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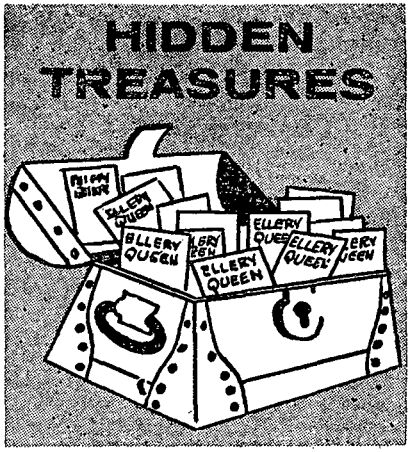

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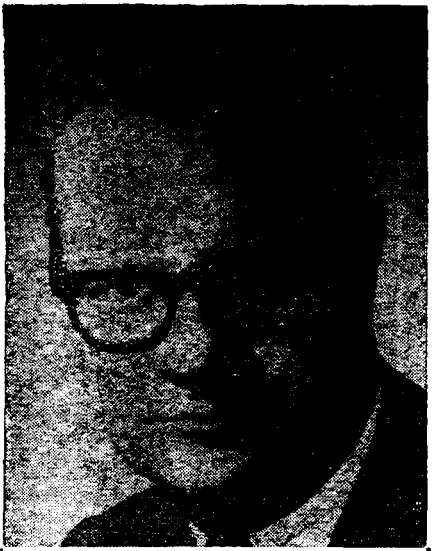

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a new story by

CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG**

TITLE: ***Run—If You Can***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Los Angeles, California

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Walter was sure he'd found a way to escape justice. His sister was sure he wouldn't get away with it. But it certainly looked like a foolproof gimmick . . .*

SHE WAS THERE, OF COURSE. SHE was always there. This was his home, but he never came home without finding her waiting—no matter how late.

There she was. Sitting in the stiff chair under the lamp, wearing a dark blue dress. She was his sister, his whole family, and this was his home, so he had to come here; but he stared at her hands, her splay-fingered, big-knuckled old hands, holding the Book.

"It's midnight," she said.

"I'm a big boy," he answered nastily. "I'm forty-two years old. You know that, Helen?"

He dashed across the sitting room and through the alcove to the kitchen. He found the liquor, poured a drink. The garage was locked—he had remembered to lock it.

He came back with the glass in his hand. "I need this," he whined, because he needed her. She was his sister, she was all he had. "I had a terrible scare just now. I'm pretty much shaken up. I got home all right, though. Nobody saw me."

"Somebody saw you, Walter," she said in that mad and maddening way she had, that way of being so absolutely sure.

"No, no," he said, knowing that his eyes were rolling, that he was

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sweating again. "Way out in the country. Not a soul around. Listen, I don't know where she came from. All of a sudden there was this little car. How could I stop? It wasn't my fault. I just couldn't stop. I did stop, afterwards." He gulped at the drink. "I don't know who she was. How could I know? I got out of there. Little bitty car, turned right over. They make them too small, too narrow . . . Listen, she was dead. There was nothing I could do for her any more—nothing."

"Alone?" his sister asked.

"Of course, alone," he said angrily. "And I got home all right, didn't I? The car's in the garage. I looked it over, as good as I could. There isn't a mark on it."

"There is a mark," his sister said.

"Quit with that stuff, will you?" he shouted. "It was an accident, I tell you! How can you stop if you're doing seventy? You don't know anything about things like that. I'm telling you, nobody saw, nobody is going to know, and you won't say anything."

"There'll be no need," she said, with the certainty that was like contempt. She had no color in her long narrow face. She never had. Even her lips had no color. Her pale hands lifted the Book. "Nothing shall be hidden," she whispered.

She drove him nuts sometimes. "I couldn't do anything for her, could I? It wasn't really my fault, was it? I'd been driving a long time and my eyes were tired. I couldn't help that, could I? It's too bad. I mean, I'm sorry. I'm upset, believe me I am. Tomorrow I'll change all the tires on the car. I'm not . . ."

Her eyes were set deep, and the eye sockets caught shadows.

"Don't talk about it," he cried, although she was not speaking. "Listen, I'm all in. I had a shock. I got to get some sleep. I had an awful shock and I'm tired. So don't talk about it."

She said nothing. But he went staggering away, off to his bedroom. He'd sleep. He'd take a pill—two of them, to make sure. She wouldn't approve. Helen didn't approve of anything. He ought to get away from her; but he couldn't get away. Curled up in his bed, he could hear her moving around the apartment, making everything neat for the night . . . and somehow he felt safe.

"You're late," she said, when he came home from work the next night and stood, tense and wary, just inside the door.

"Anybody come around? Anybody poking around the garage?"

"No."

"The bus was slower than molasses," he grumbled, and then took a few steps, on tiptoe. Which was absurd. "It's in the evening paper," he told her. "Her name was Mary Lovelace. Lovelace. Some name, eh? She was dead, all right. Some farmer found her, about four in the morning." He moistened his lips.

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"Hit-and-run, they say in the paper."

"Yes," said his sister, nodding agreement. "Dinner is waiting."

"There was nothing I could do, was there? I didn't see her. I couldn't stop. Didn't mean to do it. Listen, it happens every day—every day. Forget it. Get dinner on, will you?"

"As soon as you wash up, Walter," his sister said.

But at the table he kept talking and talking. "I looked at the car this morning, by daylight, and I couldn't see a thing. Nothing's dented. Didn't scrape the paint, not that I can make out. No glass broken. But I'm not going to drive it, Helen. See, they've got these police laboratories. It's spooky what they can come up with. One speck of dust, maybe, and you're a gone goose. What am I going to do with the car?"

"It doesn't matter what you do with the car," she said.

"Oh, come on," Walter shoved his chair back. "You're nuts, you know that, Helen? *You* ought to know that. I know it. So I'm taking care of this. And you're not going to open your mouth about it—not one word."

He grinned and looked sly, because he was sure. She was all he had, his whole family, and she would not betray him.

"I have prayed for you," she said.

"You'd do better to try and help me figure out how to get rid of it. Of the car, I mean. The *car.*" (Sometimes she looked so stupid!) "Say I buy four new tires. But who knows if they're checking up on sales like that? Say I have a new paint job done. Same thing—they may be checking. What I've got to do, I've got to be a little bit smarter than that, that's all."

She said nothing. She just looked at him in that stupid way.

"Also," he continued, finding some ease in voicing his anxieties, "I know better than to drive it out to the desert, or some place, and just leave it. They'd pick it up and trace it so fast . . . Well, so I can't run it off some cliff into the ocean, either. They'd find it—you can bet on it. They'd want to know how and why. So how am I going to get rid of that car?"

His sister whispered, "How are you going to get rid of your sin?"

"What sin?" he bellowed. "Sure, I broke the law. I know that. Sure, there's a law that says you've got to report a thing like that. Well, I didn't want to report it. I didn't want to be in a mess over just an accident—an unavoidable accident, I tell you! Nobody saw. Nobody knows. Nobody *will* know, if I can only get rid of the car. So that's my problem."

"Why don't you sell it?" she said in a moment.

"What will I do? Trade it in? And the cops find it on a second-

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hand lot? And there are records kept—damn it, you don't understand."

"I understand better than you," she sighed.

"Oh, shut up, will you? Will you, please? I'm *going* to get rid of the car and the whole mess with it. There must be a way. I'll figure out a way. I can't eat," he said. "I don't want any more dinner." He glowered at her. "Don't you get any nutty idea *you'll* go to the police."

"It won't be necessary," she said.

He flung himself up from the table. "It'll stay in the garage till Saturday. I'll do something about it on Saturday."

"You cannot—"

He interrupted viciously, "You want to bet? You want to put your money where your mouth is, just once in your life? You're getting worse all the time. You know that, Helen? I'm going to buy us a television set too."

He mumbled away into the sitting room. They didn't even have a television set. She read one Book—one Book all the time. He had to go watch television in some bar.

As soon as Walter turned the Saturday sports page, he saw the ad. Carrying the paper, he trotted to where his sister was watering her row of potted plants in the kitchen window.

"I got it," he told her. "Listen to this swap ad. Talk about perfect! This is it, Helen."

"Exchange: Fine view lot for late model auto. Must be in good condition for long trip. Quick deal. Phone ———"

"So?" he cried. "Isn't this it? Isn't it?" She straightened her long flat back, and her thin neck lengthened. "The perfect way to get rid of the car," he cried impatiently. "I'll swap it for whatever he's got. A lot, it says here."

"A piece of land?"

"All right! I need a lot like a hole in the head. What's the difference? Here's a man, he's going on a long trip and he's going quick. So let *him* drive that car out of the state and that's the way to be rid of it."

"Do you think so?" his sister said tonelessly.

"The deal gets recorded, sure. But so what? License number, engine number, make and model, and all that. So what about it? They won't tell anything. The car itself will be gone, far away. So how will the police ever get the car into their laboratories? This is going to be the way, I tell you, and it'll work."

"There is another way," she said.

"What way?"

"Confess."

"Oh for . . . ! Listen, I could go to jail! Which I am *not*." Walter flung himself off to the telephone.

When he hung up, he was sweating a little. But he said to his sister (to whom else could he say anything?), "Sounds good. Fellow wants me to run over to his place right away, and we can go take a

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look at this lot. Well, from his point of view it makes sense, you know? So I got to take the chance and drive the car. He's only two, three miles away. Then this lot is 'way up in the hills and who's going to be up there? Nobody's been around here yet, and it's four days. Listen, the best of it is, he wants to take off on a trip tonight! So this is really it—the way out."

His sister said nothing and he shouted to her silence. "What can happen? Nothing is going to happen. You're going to keep your mouth shut and you are the only one who knows."

"I am not the only one who knows," she said.

"God knows, eh?" snarled Walter. "You give me the creeps sometimes. You know what you are, Helen? You're superstitious, that's what you are. You're a real nut with this stuff. You don't understand this world at all. I'm going, and I'm going to get rid of the car."

"Go with God," she said sadly.

"With or without, I'm *going*," he shouted, sweating.

But Walter went in terror and he knew it. He backed his car out of the garage for the first time since the accident and walked all around it, convincing himself that there was absolutely no visible sign of any damage. Nothing to betray him.

Then he drove off, carefully. The sight of a prowl car drenched him in sweat, but the policemen didn't even see him.

He was peering at house numbers when a tall thin young man came walking toward him with an air of having been waiting impatiently. He said his name was Anderson. He seemed to have no time to waste and no inclination for small talk. He paid little attention to the appearance of the car, to the paint or the chrome. He did lift the hood. Then he got into the driver's seat and Walter, who kept talking nervously, got in beside him.

"I take care of a car," Walter babbled. "I believe in that. I'm not one of these people who runs a car into the ground. A car's a valuable piece of property. She runs pretty sweet, wouldn't you say?"

Anderson, testing the car's functioning, drove up into the hills along winding streets and then, above the streets, on winding roads. Then he stopped.

"This it?" Walter blinked. Oh, yes, he had better show some interest in the lot.

They got out and Walter blinked again. There was a fine view. The great basin of Los Angeles lay, wide and beautiful in spite of itself, below them. The lot was more level than most. Anderson pointed out the boundary stakes. It wasn't a bad size, either.

"That's it," said the young man with his air of impatient briskness. "I'll take the car if you'll take the lot. Is it a deal?"

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Walter licked his lips. "You'll take the car," he said slowly, "and be gone. Right? But this real estate —the title check, the closing? I mean, what guarantee do I have?"

"I've got the deed in my pocket and my lawyer, with a power of attorney, can handle the details. Suppose I have him meet us right away."

"You don't . . . er . . . want to stick around, yourself till Monday?"

"No," said Anderson, and his voice was positive.

Walter glanced around the site once more. "Looks okay," he admitted. "I mean, how can it miss? Unless there's a gimmick. Eh, Mr. Anderson?"

The young man turned his back and started toward the car. "If you don't want it, say so."

"Title clear? No liens?" Walter walked after him.

"That's what I said. You know they'll search it. Well? If not, say so and I'll find another car."

"Well, I'll tell you—" Suddenly Walter recalled his prime motive. "Okay, it's a deal. Say the car is yours, the lot is mine, even swap, as of right now. Okay?"

"Okay."

In the sunlight, on the high hillside, with the wind on them, they shook hands on it.

There remained only the paper work. Walter said, "Why don't we do this over a cup of coffee? I'll drive. There's a short cut down to my place from here. You can call your lawyer to come over to my place, can't you?" Now he was anxious to get it done with.

"Any way that's quick," Anderson said.

On the way downhill, Walter kept glancing at the face of his silent companion. "This trip," he said, "You taking off tonight?"

"Yes—right away."

"Going far?"

"As far as I can go."

Walter said no more. When they came to the apartment building in which he and Helen lived, he ran the car around the corner and into the garage, pretending that he was doing this absent-mindedly. He apologized and left the garage door open. It was safe enough. He then led his companion up the stairs.

She was there, of course. She was always there.

"This is my sister, Helen, Mr. Anderson. We've got some business," he added quickly, before she could speak. His tone told her that the business was none of hers. "Make us some coffee, will you, Helen?" He showed Anderson to the phone. While Anderson was using it, Walter followed his sister into the kitchen.

"This is it," he said, "So keep still. Swear to me, you'll keep your mouth shut."

Her pale lips parted. Her pale eyes in their deep caverns looked at him with pity. Then they closed, and her lips closed.

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The two men sat down at the table in the alcove and began to produce what papers they had. Helen brought in the coffee silently. She left them and sat down in the stiff chair in the other room, and took the Book into her hands.

When there was nothing more to do until the lawyer arrived, there seemed nothing more to say. Anderson glanced at the woman in the chair, glanced at his watch. Walter began to find the silence too hard to bear. "This lawyer *is* coming, isn't he?"

"In a few minutes."

"How do I know—?" Walter began. Then he controlled himself. "Kind of in a hurry, aren't you, Mr. Anderson?" he inquired.

"I'd like to be on my way."

"Well, all we got to do is wait for this . . . er . . . friend of yours."

Walter looked up slyly from under lowered brows. He was nobody's pigeon. How did he know that the man they were waiting for was, in fact, a lawyer?

Anderson looked at his watch again. He glanced through the arch at the silent woman, stiff in the stiff chair.

Walter said, "How come you don't own a car? A young fellow like you. I was kind of wondering."

"I own a car. It's in bad shape."

"No trade-in value?"

"Not worth bothering about."

Walter twitched. After a moment he said, "How long did you say you owned that lot, Mr. Anderson?"

"I didn't say," snapped the young man. He seemed about to jump out of his skin. "A little more than a year," he answered, rather coldly.

"More coffee?" asked Walter, beginning to rise.

"No. No, thanks."

Walter sighed and began to wish that his sister would get up and come over to them and act like—well, like a woman. Chat a little, be pleasant. But she just sat there. He jerked his head to get Anderson's eye and said in a low voice, "My sister's quite a Bible reader. Kind of wrapped up in that stuff, you know?"

"I see." But the man didn't see. He wasn't even listening. He was studying his left hand that clenched and opened and clenched again, in rhythmic tension.

Walter was too nervous to remain silent. "To me," he said, "the times are modern, right? I do my best. I work for a living. I'm a businessman." He went on uncontrollably. "Looks to me, if you'd hang on to that property six months or another year you ought to turn a nice profit. Right now—you know this, don't you?—it's worth more than a second-hand car."

"We have agreed," said Anderson stiffly.

"Oh, sure. Sure, we got a deal. I'm not complaining. No offense, Mr. Anderson. But what would it hurt, for instance, if you'd take your hair down a bit. Eh? Just for the sake of my curiosity, why

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don't you tell me? What's the gimmick?"

"The what?"

"The hitch? What's wrong with that lot?"

Anderson started to get up.

"No, no," said Walter quickly, holding a protective hand over the papers. "The deal is set. That's what I'm saying. Just looks to me like you're on the short end. I'm wondering why, that's all."

The man stared at him stonily.

"See, it's been my experience," Walter went on, unable to restrain himself, "that people don't ever get something for nothing—not in this world, hah, hah!"

The doorbell rang.

"Get the door, will you, Helen?" Walter called. She rose. He heard a man's voice say politely, "I am looking for a Mr. Robert Anderson."

Helen said nothing.

"Oh, for . . . !" Walter stood up. "Right this way," he called out.

He felt a deep relief, but the aftertaste of his curiosity was still strong. So he looked down and said to the young man softly, "Listen, does *he* know where the body is buried? Maybe?"

Anderson's eyes flashed. He called out the lawyer's name. An older man came toward them, well-dressed, crisp and businesslike in speech and manner. It took only a few minutes more—a few signatures. Then all three rose and Walter held out the car keys.

Anderson snatched the keys and began to cross the sitting room, moving quickly. Walter shuffled fast to keep alongside. He was convinced, now, that this man was running away. But from what?

They almost collided as Anderson stopped and murmured to Helen, still sitting in her chair, "Happy to have met you."

Her pale lips did not open. Oh, she was a nut, *really*, thought her brother.

"Come on," he said crossly, "you can say goodbye to the gentleman, Helen."

"God be with you, gentleman," she said.

This was odd enough to hold Anderson for a moment, as the lawyer, brief case in hand, joined them.

"Goodbye," he said pleasantly to Helen, and then to Walter, "Goodbye. I'll be seeing you, perhaps. Good luck with your acquisition."

Then Walter was whining at their backs—he just couldn't help it. "Look, gents, excuse me, but that lot is worth five, six thousand, if it's worth a nickel. All right. I'm stuck with it now. And that's okay. But what's the gimmick? Please?"

The lawyer said severely, "No gimmick."

"But there *has* to be a gimmick," cried Walter.

"And you have to know, don't you?" asked Anderson hoarsely.

"Don't, Bob," said the lawyer, touching his client's arm. "We're through here. Let's go."

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"Now wait," said Walter frantically. "This is beginning to look pretty funny."

"Funny?" said Anderson. "I bought that lot to put a dream house on it for my bride. There is no bride."

"I see. I see." Walter was deflated so suddenly that he almost fell. "I'm sorry. I didn't realize it was personal. That's okay, then." He was nodding. "Yes, that's all right."

"All right?" said Anderson on a note of rising anger. "All right?"

Walter had begun to sweat. He looked behind him. His sister, with the Book in her hands, had her head high, and on her pale lips was the weird little smile—the smile that was going to drive him nuts one of these days.

"She was driving my sports car last Tuesday night," said Anderson violently, "and somebody flipped her into a ditch. So there'll be no dream house and I never want to see the site of it again. That's what's the matter with the lot."

Now Walter was not only sweating, he was shaking from head to foot.

It was the lawyer who held out his hand in farewell. Walter didn't dare touch it. "Listen. Excuse me. I'm sorry. I didn't mean anything. So long, I mean . . . Go with God," Walter bleated idiotically. A high giggle came out of him.

"Shall we go, Bob?" the lawyer said softly.

But Anderson said, "What's the matter here?"

Walter's jowls were shaking. "No, no," he said. He spread his hands. The palms were wet. "Why should there be a gimmick? Nothing's the matter here—nothing at all."

Anderson's eyes bored into Walter's, then swerved to Helen's.

"What is it?" he said to her, sharply.

But her lips were closed.

For Walter, something cracked. "You're crazy, Helen," he shrieked. "You know that? She's crazy," he sobbed to the two men. "Don't *listen* to her! *Shut your mouth!*" he howled to his silent sister.

The lawyer had dropped any intention of leaving. Anderson spoke, in the stern and quiet voice of doom. "I think you'd better tell me. What's wrong with the car? What's the gimmick?"

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DETECTIVE SHORT NOVEL—*complete!*

The evidence against Tony Andrews was overwhelming—motive, opportunity, means, all hopelessly incriminating from Tony's grim point of view. But Tony was a businessman with brains. Surely his brains could save him . . . or could they?

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THE BLIZZARD MURDER CASE

by PHILIP WYLIE

THE WIND BLEW HARDER AND Tony looked out of the window with a feeling of apprehension. It was not a natural emotion to him. He watched battalions of snow charge at the chrome-steel gargoyle mounted outside his skyscraper apartment. The metal animal bit back at the storm—and the battalions whirled on.

It was uncanny, Tony thought. Uncanny, because, less than a week ago, he had been wearing a pith helmet to protect himself from drenching sunshine in South America.

A door opened and he spun around. There was a fire burning in the grate and the opening of the door drove ashes from the hearth.

It was Tony's Filipino boy. He said, "Good evening, Mr. Andrews."

Tony nodded. He had had Pedro for three years—ever since the senior partner in his firm, David Cole, had come to him and said, "I want you to take my Filipino off my my hands. He's a fine fellow and a superb cook, as you very well know, but I can't seem to get along with him. We've had two or three furious battles."

Pedro walked to the fire and held out his hands. His brown skin was tinged with blue and he was shivering. Snow still clung to his overcoat.

Tony wondered whether the fact that David Cole had fought with the Filipino boy explained in part why he and Cole had argued so feverishly that afternoon. Maybe Cole was at bottom an irascible and unreasonable man.

Pedro took a newspaper from his coat pocket. "Your name in my paper three times." He walked across the room and Tony mechani-

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cally accepted the tabloid. "Page seven, page eighteen, page twenty-six. Marked in blue pencil."

Tony read. First, Cavalier's column. "Tony Andrews, popular bachelor-at-large, brought the third prettiest girl in New York to the fights last night . . ."

On page eighteen there was a picture of the Squadron M Polo Team, which, according to the caption, was to "defend its laurels on January 14th." Tony squinted at his likeness—as does every man of thirty-eight—to see if he had lost anything in the last ten years. He saw a broad-shouldered, level-eyed man, with a lot of curly hair.

Then he turned to the third mention of his name, which had been ringed in pencil by Pedro. It was a dignified financial advertisement: "Cole, Boyd & Andrews—Bonds."

That wasn't what he had been expecting; he looked farther, and finally said to Pedro, "I'm mentioned four times. I made a speech at the Advertising Association today." He began to read aloud, with irony in his voice: " 'Anthony Andrews, just returned from South America, stressed again his well-known thesis that a majority of the best brains in America go into business. "Business creates the wealth which gives the scientist his laboratory and the musician his concert hall," he said.' "

Tony threw the newspaper into a chair. "That's what I said, Pedro. Businessmen are brainy. And I haven't got brains enough to run my own business!"

The doorbell rang.

Pedro answered it. Leslie Boyd was welcomed into the apartment by another puff of ashes and the scream of wind through the teeth of the gargoyle. The remaining partner in the firm of Cole, Boyd & Andrews was diminutive, electrical, and debonair. He was five feet two and he weighed less than one hundred pounds. His eyes were dancing and gray-green; his smile was quick and human.

Boyd was one of those rare undersized men who are obviously neither a martinet nor a self-adjudged Napoleon. His suit was eloquently tailored; an emerald glittered in his tie and two more on his fingers. He had a passion for emeralds, and in his safe-deposit box was a world-famous collection of them.

The ashes from the hearth settled on the carpet. The wind stopped moaning and the snow fell evenly. Pedro went for highballs. Leslie Boyd quit smiling when he sat down. "I came over here, Tony, in spite of this blizzard—"

"—to tell me," Tony interrupted, "that I'm a fool to keep on fighting with Dave Cole."

Pedro brought the drinks and Tony dismissed him for the night.

Les waited till the Filipino was gone and then shook his head. "Not exactly. You've been to South America. You know the situation. I'm ready to admit that it's quite

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possible that Senor Alavo's mines don't warrant the issue. I'm perfectly willing to admit that if we sell ten million dollars' worth of bonds to our customers and they go blooey, it won't help our reputation as a firm. But you know Dave's temperament! You've had hundreds of fights with him! He likes to be unreasonable for a while and then have the pleasure of giving in and making everybody feel that he is doing a favor. If you had just shut up this afternoon instead of storming all over the office like a frustrated gangster, he would have come around all right."

Tony's nod was a calm agreement. "I know it. Dave's just a little bit old-womanish. But, after all, I'd been there and I knew what I was talking about and he didn't. Les, I've half a notion to resign. More than half."

Boyd smiled again—unhappily. "Damn it, Tony, you know perfectly well that you'll cool off. Dave's an older brother to you. We three guys have been through a lot together and I'm not going to see you and Dave raising hell with each other. If I can't persuade you to let Dave have his head—even if it means we do have to take and sell a bunch of bum bonds—I'm going over to Dave's house and go to work on him. I think Dave would come to his senses if you let him alone, but if you fight with him he'll stand you off all winter. How about it? Tell him tomorrow morning that you made up your mind that the final decision is up to him. Tell him—"

Tony shook his head. He was as stubborn as Dave. But he was right. He knew he was right. "I'm sorry, Les, but I've decided to make an issue out of this. Either old Dave quits acting like a dictator or I leave the firm."

Les sighed, and lighted a cigarette. "The two best friends I have in the world are you and Dave, and I'm prepared to go to any lengths to keep you two birds from acting like bulldogs. I *have* prepared, in fact." He stood up. "But I guess I'm starting from the wrong end, huh?" His eyes twinkled. "I'll go down and talk to Dave, if I have to hire a snowplow to get there."

Tony didn't say anything.

Les paused at the door. "No hard feelings?"

Tony shook his head. "None. I'm awfully sorry, Les. I hate to hurt you, but I still insist that I must maintain my attitude."

Boyd chuckled. "Okay, Tony. I'll go down and see Dave. Good night."

"Good night." Tony could hear Les whistling as he waited for the elevator.

But Tony's mood had not been shaken. He sat down in front of the fire and for a long time he did not move . . .

When the telephone rang he swept back his right arm to take it up. "Hello?"

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"Hello." It was Les's voice and he sounded excited. "Listen, Tony! You've got to get right down to Dave's apartment!"

"What's the matter?"

"Somebody's murdered him!"

"Be right there!"

Tony slammed down the telephone and started for his hat and coat. He put them on and grabbed his doorknob, and only then halted. Perhaps he should call the police—or Jack Raymond, the firm's lawyer. But Les would have done that. The thing to do was to get there, and get there fast . . .

David Cole lived on the top floor of a converted house on West Ninth Street. He had occupied it for twenty-two years. Mrs. Bunnell, his only servant, had been in his employ since he had fired Pedro. It was her custom to arrive at seven in the morning, prepare his breakfast, serve it, clean his apartment, and leave.

Tony paid the cab, bounded through the driving snow up the six brownstone steps to the vestibule, and rang Dave's bell.

The door latch didn't click.

He rang again.

There was still no answering click. Impatiently he hunted for his key ring. Dave had given both Les and himself duplicate keys to the apartment. Tony let himself in, went up four flights of stairs, and knocked on Dave's door.

There was a dark stairway behind him that led to the roof, which Dave used in the summer. The hall was wallpapered with a ship design. There was a crimson carpet on the floor, a refectory table, a couple of antique Spanish chairs, and a sizzling radiator. The hall was hot.

Tony noticed those things because he waited a long time after his knock. He was surprised that Les hadn't clicked the door downstairs, or answered his pounding. Presently he unlocked the door with his own key and walked in. He closed the door behind him.

Dave was lying on his face on the floor between two sofas with his arms stretched out toward the grate, where a cannel coal fire was glowing. The hilt of a knife stuck up between his shoulder blades. He was wearing dinner clothes. Half a dozen lamps were lighted, but the room was big and the ceiling was so high it looked shadowy.

On a table behind one of the two facing sofas were a number of objects that had evidently been recently put there: three or four fishing rods, several boxes of spools of heavy line, two 9/0 reels, and a .45 automatic.

Tony saw all that in one long look. Then he raised his voice: "Les!"

There wasn't any answer. He took off his hat and started to take off his gloves, and changed his mind without exactly deciding why. He crossed the living room, walked down a carpeted hall, opened a door, and turned on a light. The twin beds in Dave's guest room were covered, the closets were empty.

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In Dave's own room the lights were burning and the bureau drawers pulled open. There was a copy of the *Wall Street Post* on the bed and a round spot in the pillow where Dave had lain while reading it. A gray suit with a blue stripe which Dave had worn in the office that day was hanging from one of the bureau drawers with a note pinned on it.

Tony walked over and read the note: "Mrs. B—Let's change cleaners. I'm tired of smelling like a benzine refinery."

On top of the bureau was a plush-covered case in which were half a dozen sets of studs and cuff buttons worth, Tony thought, after looking them over, a couple of thousand dollars. Beside the case in a clip were five $100 bills, three $20's, two $10's, a $5, and eight $1's, as well as 93 cents in change. He looked into the bathroom. The tub was empty, but there were damp towels and puddles on the floor. Dave always bathed like a grampus.

The kitchen was in Mrs. Bunnell's perfect condition—nothing out of place.

Tony went back to the living room and picked up the telephone. It was a hand phone and the wire was cut at the bottom of the mouthpiece. He decided to go out and get the police. He turned the knob of the front door and pushed, but something was blocking it and it wouldn't open.

He put his shoulder against it and pushed as hard as he could. Those two Spanish chairs had been quietly jammed between the door and the staircase while he was investigating the rear of the apartment.

He turned around fast, and in the mirror above the fireplace he saw that his face was ghastly white. The kitchen door had two locks on it, one a bolt driven by a key—but the key wasn't there.

He went back to the living room and looked at Dave's .45. It was loaded and it hadn't been used. He put it in his pocket. Underneath the .45 was a copy of the *New York Register* open to a page that had a seven-column advertisement for Wharton Bros, and a one-column news story. One of the subheads contained his own name: "A. G. Andrews says best brains are in business." Penciled on the front page was, "Boyd—14-B."

Tony stared at the newspaper article about brains. He was trapped with the murdered body of his best friend, with whom on that very afternoon he had had a quarrel so furious that they had almost come to blows—and in the presence of half a dozen other people. He needed brains. More, he thought, than he possessed.

He took out a cigarette. Before he snapped open his lighter he slowly drew a deep breath. There was perfume in the air, heavy but very faint. He could not identify it with a person. He knew only that he had smelled it before. So he postponed lighting his cigarette. The

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woman would have been sitting on the sofa, talking to Dave.

He walked to the back of one of the sofas and sniffed, but the perfume wasn't any stronger there. Then, after clenching one of his gloved hands tightly, he tried the opposite sofa. He sniffed along the top—right up to the place where it was soaked with blood—blood that blotted the back and the seat and the carpet between the sofa and the place where Dave lay. Right beside the stain the scent of the perfume was stronger, but Tony still couldn't recognize it.

He sat down across from the bloody upholstery, and then he did light his cigarette. Dave was lying with his hands stretched out and palms flat. The position reminded Tony of something. He had seen Dave lying like that before. He remembered.

Dave was fifty-one but had kept himself in perfect physical shape—so perfect, in fact, that once or twice, when his age was mentioned, he had done a suspension press to show that there was still youth and vitality in his muscles. To do a suspension press one must lie face down on the floor, extend one's arms as far forward as possible, and, by pressing down with both palms, bow up one's entire body from hands to toes. Not very many people are able to do it.

Somebody had stabbed Dave, and Dave had tried to stand up and had fallen on his face, but he had made one last blind, terrific effort to get to his feet by pressing down with his outstretched palms. Then he had died.

There were ashes on Tony's cigarette and he got up and tapped them carefully into the coal grate. Then he sat down again, and he saw a little bit of white material almost concealed by the cushions on the opposite sofa. He stepped over Dave's body and pulled out a woman's handkerchief with the initials L. R. on it.

He smelled it—but the perfume in the room, the perfume on the upholstery, was not Loretta's. He put the handkerchief on the fire and watched it burn, and mixed up its ashes in the coals with the poker.

He was deathly frightened. Where was Les Boyd? What woman had been there besides Loretta? If Boyd had gone out to get the police, why weren't they here? And where was the person who had blocked the door? Who was he?

That was fear—but suddenly his fear turned to sheer horror.

He was staring at the handle of the knife in Dave's back.

It was the handle of an ordinary hunting knife, a brown, thick handle that gave a good grip. He had one exactly like it. Of course, he thought rapidly, hundreds of other people had such knives. Thousands.

Only—only, his knife was a little different.

The point was broken. He had broken it trying to kill a moray that

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he had hauled part way over the stern of a fishing boat in Florida. He had missed his first stab, deeply nicking the point of his knife against a bronze cleat.

His horror was due to a certainty that the knife in Dave's back was his own.

If so, who could identify it? Pedro . . . He had to look at that knife.

He knelt beside Dave's body, hesitated a moment, and then seized the hilt. It pulled out easily. The point *was* broken. His knife.

He looked at the fire—and the knife. It wouldn't burn. He didn't dare pocket it. Opening the window and throwing it into the street might be more dangerous than useful, because that sort of thing someone might witness. The best thing to do was to put the knife back. He could prove—

But he didn't have an alibi. He had gone out for supper alone and had been alone all evening. The waiter would remember that he had dined at Boland's, but not when or for how long. His heart was banging steadily. Somebody had picked up his knife in his apartment so that he would be convicted of Dave's murder.

He held the knife up to the fire to make sure it was his and, as he did so, the front door behind him slowly opened. He didn't hear it. Carefully he thrust the blade in the wound just as it had been. Then he felt cold air on his back, and as he sprang to his feet he whipped out Dave's automatic.

A girl stood there, A girl with silver-blonde hair and gray eyes. There was snow on her hat and shoulders.

Her name was Wanda Jones. She was Tony's secretary.

His fear faded and in its place came a sort of embarrassment. The girl also seemed embarrassed. She was thinking, perhaps, not that David Cole was dead, but that her employer would wonder why she was visiting his partner at night and without Tony's knowledge.

"You'd better come in and close the door," Tony said.

She did so, not looking toward the fireplace. "Who did it?"

"I don't know." On an impulse he looked into the hall. The two heavy Spanish chairs were in their places, where they had been when he had entered; so he closed the door again.

She took off her coat. "Maybe you'd better tell me about it."

At that time he did not realize how much the presence of Wanda Jones relieved his mind. For three years her graciousness and capability had made his office more human and more effective and a more desirable place to work. She was diplomatic and dependable and discreet. In three years he had gleaned only a hazy idea of her origin and her way of life. But he was glad she was there, and he told her exactly what had happened, from the moment of

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Les's telephone call to the opening of the hall door.

Then he said to her, "How did you get in?"

"I have keys. Mr. Cole gave them to me this afternoon."

He looked at the girl with sudden jealousy. "Would you rather I didn't ask you any more questions about you and Dave?"

Miss Jones smiled. "I think it would be better if you asked me a lot more. Better still if I told you just what happened. And may I have a cigarette?"

He offered his case. They sat down. The back of a sofa screened Cole's body.

"At five this afternoon you left Mr. Cole's office after telling him flatly that you were against taking over Señor Alavo's bond issue."

" 'Flatly' is a mild word for it."

"Immediately afterward Senora Alavo called up and told Mr. Cole that she was going to call on him this evening at nine—presumably to use her charm to help sell the bonds. Mr. Cole had argued in favor of them with you, but after you had gone he began to waver. He didn't seem to relish the idea of entertaining Señora Alavo—"

Tony nodded. "Latin, damn' good-looking, and probably scared old Dave to death."

"—so he asked me if I would appear at nine thirty sharp, apparently to take some important dictation. His own secretary had gone. He gave me keys to the downstairs door and this one, and told me he was sure that if I came in that way, and Senora Alavo were still here, she'd leave."

"No doubt," Tony said dryly.

That explained the perfume. He had connected the heavy aroma with the wife of their South American client the instant Miss Jones had mentioned her name. She had been there. Loretta Raymond had been there. Les Boyd had been there.

Possibly Miss Jones had been there earlier in the evening, and was now lying. Her story was pretty thin, but he wanted to believe it, and it had one element in its favor: David Cole was terrified of women, particularly of attractive women, and the South American banker's wife was young and dazzling and very shrewd.

"We'll go downstairs," he said, "and take a cab to the police station."

She put out her cigarette. "You're on the spot, Mr. Andrews," she said. "Does anybody know you're here?"

He shook his head.

"Did Mr. Boyd call you from here?"

"I assumed that he did, but there's no reason for that assumption—is there?"

"No." she answered.

He picked up the ashtray in which she had ground out her cigarette and walked across the room and tossed the stub on the fire, while she continued to talk. "If the police

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know you were here and that your own knife killed Mr. Cole—it will be difficult for you. They are bound to find out about the argument you and he had this afternoon. I think that you and I ought to go to the movies."

"What!"

She went on calmly. "That'll give both of us an alibi for the evening. On the way we can call Mr. Boyd. Of course, he may make all this precaution unnecessary. Have you seen any pictures lately?"

"I went to the opening of *The Arab*."

"Swell!" the girl said. "I've seen it, too, so we'll only have to go to the theater long enough to buy tickets and lose ourselves inside."

He shook his head. "If you think that I'm going to pretend that I haven't been here tonight you're mistaken."

"Then why did you keep your gloves on?"

He stared at her. Her face was disarming. Was she kidding him? Was she part of somebody's scheme to enmesh him in the death of his partner? Or was she trying to help him out of appalling jeopardy?

He didn't know, but he did know that he was going to take a chance on Miss Jones. He made only one more brief compromise. "Why do you think it's so necessary for me to keep out of this?"

The girl's voice was bitter. "Do you know anything about the police, Mr. Andrews? Because I do. Plenty. You'll have trouble enough if they identify that knife. But if they knew you had been here, you'd be in jail tonight without bail."

"I still think we ought to call them."

"The police," she answered, "are cruel and stupid."

Tony put Dave's automatic back on the table. They went out and closed the door. They saw nobody in the halls. Out on the street the storm was raging and the night seemed to be colder still . . .

While they were walking down the stairs the front window of David Cole's apartment was opened from the outside by two men who were standing on a little iron balcony. The icy dementia of the night boiled into the warm living room, and it was followed by the feet of the two men.

Their uniforms were covered with snow. They were stiff from bending over in the shadow and listening through the crack they had made at the bottom of the window. They had reached their peculiar post of observation just as Tony took the knife from Cole's back. One of them was young and the other was old.

"So we're stupid?" said the former.

The older man grinned without amusement. "That's what she said, Lieutenant."

"Let's get to work."

Miss Jones jumped out of a taxicab and into a cigar store and dialed Leslie Boyd's apartment in the Brail

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Hotel; but there was no answer to her call so she went back to the cab. It dropped them at 48th Street and Broadway. Tony bought two tickets to *The Arab* and they went in. They watched the picture for twenty minutes and left the theater by a side exit.

The girl went into a drug store, and came back, reporting that she had tried Boyd but that there was still no answer.

After that Tony took charge. "We're going to see Raymond." Raymond was the firm's lawyer.

Miss Jones said, "That's right."

Raymond lived on East 61st Street in a private house. He opened the door. His greeting was genial and he led them into a big room elaborately furnished.

"Sit down, old man. I can guess what's brought you here. Dave still wants to sell that bond issue and Les is on the fence as usual. All right. I am on your side."

He was a big man, with cheerful gray eyes.

Tony had an idea. "Where were you earlier this evening?"

"Where but here? Home alone. Loretta's out, but she'll be back after the theater." He chuckled. "She told me that you asked her last night if you could be my son-in-law." His eyes were mischievous. "I warned her that she could never reform you but I gave my permission. I think she's going to accept you, my boy. She's a fine girl, Tony, but if you marry her you'll have to hit her over the head with a beer bottle every week or so."

For some reason Tony looked at Miss Jones. She was quite pale.

"I called you up about nine thirty tonight," Tony said, "and there was no answer."

It was a lie. He wanted to see how Jack Raymond would take it—and Raymond looked utterly baffled. "But that can't be! I was right here, and nobody called."

Tony nodded. "That's right, Jack. I was just checking up on you . . . Listen, Jack. Dave is lying in his apartment with my knife through his back."

Raymond took a cigar from the humidor. He had trouble lighting it. He said, "You didn't—?"

Tony shook his head. "No, Jack I didn't." He told his story. All of it—the precise truth.

When Tony finished, Jack picked up the telephone and called Les Boyd. There was still no answer. He turned from the instrument. "When do you think they'll find Dave's body?"

Tony's lips were compressed. "Mrs. Bunnell. In the morning."

"I suggest we go over to Les's place and wait for him."

"All right," Tony said.

In the hall, as they put on their coats, Jack Raymond expressed a feeling Tony had kept back. "Old Dave! That guy was just like my brother."

Tony swallowed hard. Like an older brother, he thought. Dave

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Cole had picked him from a long list of customers' men and made him a partner and taught him the business. Tony was richer and wiser and happier because of Dave—and somebody had murdered Dave. They'd find that murderer! Sometimes the three men fought furiously over policy—as they had that afternoon—but it was only superficial fury. It never ended in malice.

Tony's steady gray eyes met Jack Raymond's. "Yeah. Dave was like a brother to all of us. Come on."

"I'll take the subway home," Miss Jones said. "You've got your alibi as well established as it can be. If you decide not to use it, though, let me know."

It was 11:15. As they started down the front steps of Raymond's house a limousine stopped in the deepening snow and the chauffeur helped Loretta Raymond out of the car. Jack Raymond told his daughter that they were on a business errand and would be back in a little while.

Loretta whispered in Tony's ear, "I decided *yes*." He had a glimpse of her swift-line profile and her stormy red hair. He caught her hand and squeezed it.

With Jack, then, he walked to a subway entrance. They said good night to Miss Jones.

It was only a half dozen blocks to the Brail Hotel. Tony walked across the lobby to the desk and asked for Mr. Boyd.

"He left town, sir," the clerk said.

Tony was stunned.

Jack realized the necessity of showing no emotion at that instant and said to the clerk, with apparent calm, "At what time did he leave?"

"Well over an hour ago."

"I'm Mr. Andrews," Tony cut in, "his partner."

"Yes, Mr. Andrews, I recognized you."

"Did Mr. Boyd say where he was going?"

"No, sir. He simply called up and asked that his bags be sent to him."

"He was packed, then?"

The clerk nodded. "Yes, sir. Our instructions were to put the bags in Lower 6—" The clerk rummaged through a stack of memoranda. "—Lower 6 in Car 176 on the ten o'clock for Montreal."

"Was Mr. Boyd aboard the train when your boy delivered the bags?"

"No, sir."

"I think we'd better go up to Boyd's room," Jack said.

The clerk gave them a key.

Leslie Boyd's apartment was in the mild disorder that results from hasty packing.

Tony sat down heavily. "I guess that's the answer, Jack. Les did it. Used my knife. Called me over there and shut me in when I arrived. Probably intended to keep me in there long enough so that I'd leave plenty of fingerprints, and then took the chairs away. I guess I don't need my alibi—such as it is. It's a mess, isn't it?" Drearily he walked toward the door.

"Going home?" Jack asked.

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"I thought I'd go over and talk to Loretta first. Who knows but when I get home the cops may be there waiting to carry me off to jail."

The lawyer put his arm around Tony. "You won't have to worry about that! Even if they identify that knife, I know at least five hundred ways of keeping people out of jail."

They thanked the clerk for letting them into Les Boyd's apartment, then went out into the night.

Loretta was waiting for them in the living room.

Jack Raymond glanced at his daughter and said, "You won't mind if I excuse myself? I am speaking with what is popularly called elaborate sarcasm. I'll be upstairs if she throws anything, Tony."

Tony looked at the girl who had said she would become his wife—firelight on her red hair and bright little points of flame in her eyes. Her father's amused kidding about her temper and her behavior was not altogether unfounded.

Tony was fond of her. She was exciting. For four or five years he had often been in her company, and a casual habit of saying, "You and I really ought to get married, Loretta," had eventually made him decide that he would ask her to marry him and tame her a little bit, and perhaps himself in the process, and raise sons and daughters who would be just as unmanageable and dramatic years later.

He had stood looking at her for a long time.

"Would you like a drink?" she said.

"No. What were you doing in Dave's apartment tonight?"

The fires in her eyes burned higher. "You think *I* was in Dave's apartment this evening? Were you there, Tony?"

"Peeking through a keyhole," Tony answered placidly.

Loretta looked toward the ceiling in a mockery of dismay. She said, "Alas! Then you know all! For years I have been madly in love with Dave. Tomorrow we are going to fly together to the ends of the earth! I chose him rather than you because he is richer than you are, and my poor father's gambling in the market has reduced us to poverty!"

She struck a caricatured posture of despair.

Tony did not smile. "Dave was murdered tonight with my hunting knife and I found your handkerchief on the sofa. I burned it."

Loretta turned to stone. Finally she said, "Thanks."

Tony walked over to her and took her by the arms. "Well?"

Her eyes met his directly. "What I said is sort of true, Tony." Her voice was a miserable whisper. "When I was eighteen I was infatuated with Dave. I wrote him a lot of letters. You asked me to marry you yesterday, so I thought I'd better ask him if he kept the letters."

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"You're a fool." He chucked her under the chin, then kissed her.

Loretta drew a long breath. "Dave said he had destroyed the letters as fast as I wrote them. I left his place about eight o'clock, Tony, because I had to go to the theater. He was alone and alive when I left him."

Later—much later—Tony went into the hall and got his coat. The storm was still raging. He beat snow from his shoulders as he went up in the elevator to his lofty apartment.

Pedro was there—looking frightened. Lieutenant Doyle and Sergeant McCluskey were also there. They didn't tell him that, crouched in the storm, they had watched him in Dave Cole's apartment. They described briefly the circumstances in which they had discovered the body.

Tony leaned against the mantel and smoked and looked at the men. They had ruddy, bartender-like faces and eyes that did not look either innocent or intelligent.

The lieutenant finished his description of the finding of the body.

Tony said, "That's horrible, Officer."

McCluskey turned toward his superior. "He don't seem very surprised."

The lieutenant nodded. "What about it? McCluskey's right."

Tony answered quietly, "I'm not a hysterical woman, you know."

"This is a very poor time for you to get flip, Mr. Andrews."

Tony scrutinized his cigarette. "Perhaps I feel a great deal more grieved by Dave's death than either of you would understand. Perhaps I don't care to share that grief with strangers."

Not his face, but the back of Doyle's neck, became red. "The ritz, eh? Mind condescending to tell us what you did tonight? From seven o'clock on."

Tony said, "I had dinner alone at Boland's. It was Pedro's day off. I came back here and read a book about South America. Right behind you on the table, Lieutenant. Mr. Boyd—my other partner—dropped in for a while." He explained briefly the uncompleted South American bond negotiations. "I had an appointment to take my secretary to see a motion picture that we had discussed this morning—"

"Very interesting," said the lieutenant. "What's her name?"

"Wanda Jones," Tony replied steadily, "2334 Clansdale Avenue, Woodmere. We went to the picture, and then I called on my attorney. I have just come back."

Lieutenant Doyle reached into an inside pocket and took out Tony's knife. "That's all we want to know, Mr. Andrews. Between eight and nine you killed your partner with this knife. It's yours, isn't it? Your Filipino identified it."

Pedro overrode his terror enough to speak for the first time. "I said I thought it looked like one you have. It's gone."

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Tony took his knife. "I had one like this with a nick in the point. If mine's gone, I suppose this is mine."

Doyle turned to his aide. "Put the bracelets on him, McCluskey."

Tony didn't move, but there was authority in his voice. "Keep the bracelets in your pocket, McCluskey. Do you boys want to be demoted for false arrest? And how about the suit I'd slap on you? And where's the warrant? . . . Look here. That knife has been in my house all winter and I've entertained hundreds of people. It might have been gone for months. It was in a drawer with a lot of junk. Dave might have taken it himself, because he was planning a fishing trip and came over here to borrow some of my tackle. If my knife killed him it doesn't mean anything. But think this over: Leslie Boyd, the other partner in our firm, went to see Dave this evening. He told me he was on his way there when he came here this evening. Mr. Raymond, our lawyer, and I went over to Boyd's hotel tonight. About ten o'clock this evening Boyd had his bags put in Lower 6 in Car 176 on the train for Montreal. Why don't you boys stop Boyd before he gets out of the country?"

The policemen hesitated.

"Now get the hell out of here," Tony said.

Lieutenant Doyle meditated laboriously. Finally he asked the name of Boyd's hotel, telephoned, and checked up on Tony's story. He stood up. McCluskey stood up.

"Okay, we'll let you alone for the present, Mr. Andrews. I hope it won't disturb you none to have somebody tailing you."

"None," said Tony.

In the morning with his pre-shower cup of coffee Tony read the story on page one. He thought that police headquarters had given out an unusual amount of information and that the reporters had done a particularly accurate job.

He did not know about the two men who had watched him through the window. He did not know that the police were smugly playing cat-and-mouse with him. The story told him two new things: first, that the medical examiner had set the time of Dave's death between seven and nine of the previous evening; second, that the police were concentrating on finding Leslie Boyd.

"Mr. Boyd," the newspaper story went on, "had informed no one of his intention to leave New York, but at about 9:30 he telephoned to the clerk at the Brail Hotel and ordered that his bags be placed in Lower 6 in Car 176 on the Montreal train. His bags were found to be packed and ready and were taken by a bellboy, Perry Wheaton, to the train. Wheaton reports that Mr. Boyd was not yet aboard and that he left the bags as he had been instructed to do.

"Conductor J. B. Carley, reached by the police at Rouses Point, on the Canadian border, states that Mr.

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Boyd was aboard the train and that he took up his ticket. Mr. Boyd had already retired when he reached Car 176. The train was held at Rouses Point, where it was found that Boyd was no longer in his berth and his baggage was gone. The train had stopped at Albany, but the porter is positive that Mr. Boyd did not get off at that point.

"However, the blizzard which raged last night delayed and frequently halted the express, so that it is conceivable that Mr. Boyd could have descended at any of a dozen points along the way. A statewide search for him has been instituted."

When Tony left his apartment to go to the office it was still snowing, so he hopped into a taxicab. When his cab started, another one left the hack stand in its wake. Tony looked out his rear window and made a face at the plainclothes man who was following him.

His office was in a state of chaos which became a stiff silence when he entered. He lifted his voice: "Listen, everybody. I know how you all feel today. Many of you have known Dave Cole and Les Boyd even longer than I, but I don't think any of you will miss Dave more than I do. I want all of you to go on with your work as well as you can. It will be difficult but it's the best solace. Until—"

He halted. The simple dignity with which he had spoken of the senior partner was marred when he spoke about the third member of the firm. "Until Mr. Boyd—returns—I shall assume responsibility for all transactions. Marvin, I want to talk to you and Fletcher and Graham. You can all come in together now."

He felt bleak and alone as he walked past his silent employees. Then he entered his office and saw Wanda. He smiled at her and shut the door. "I used our alibi—though I guess we didn't need it."

She nodded. She looked as if she hadn't slept. "Yes. The police phoned me late last night."

She left the office when Fletcher entered with Graham and Marvin. For two hours the four men discussed the affairs of the firm.

When the men had gone, Tony rang for Miss Jones, and she came in with her book. He had left his desk and was looking out of the window.

"Yes, Mr. Andrews?"

He still stood with his back to her. "I want to ask you some questions."

"All right."

"What do you know about the police that made you say last night they were stupid?"

Her answer came in a slow monotone. "My father was head of the bond department in a bank in the West. It doesn't matter where. It doesn't matter what his name was. Somebody underneath him embezzled a lot of money. Police investigators blamed him. Some of the evidence did point toward him,

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more or less, but he was innocent. Father was also interested in politics. He—was against the administration in our city. He"—her voice dropped—"signed a confession."

"Good Lord!" Tony turned around. The girl was sitting limply in her chair.

"They beat it out of him. He was sent up for five years. He died there."

"But couldn't somebody—?"

"Somebody could have, but nobody did. I tried. I went to newspapers. I wrote letters. I talked. The courts took everything away from us, but I kept on— even after he was dead. Then one night a couple of men came around and told me that I'd better not stay in—in that city—any more." She was silent.

"So you came here with a different name?"

Her eyes looked into him and through him and beyond him. "I knew a lot about the bond business. I decided to get a job somewhere and stick at it until I had a chance to lay my hands on a large sum of money. Then I was going to use that money to get the men who killed my father—the judge, the president of the bank, the policemen who beat him—everybody."

"Get them?" Tony echoed.

The girl smiled a little. "Oh—for days I thought that. Weeks. I didn't care what I did. Then—I got just such a job—working for you. I found out that there were some decent men in business, and of course I got over the idea I had for revenge, and of course I fell in love with you—"

She added that last remarkable statement in the same monotone she had used to express the story of her tragedy.

Tony walked across the room and sat down on a corner of his desk facing her. "You did that too, did you? When?"

She cast down her eyes and spoke almost in a whisper. "When? In the first month or week or minute. The time doesn't matter. The whole thing doesn't matter. I fell in love with you, and it gave me something to think about besides father. I imagined you knew all about it. My being in love, that is."

Tony nodded slowly. "I suppose I did. I never thought about it consciously, though, not once in my life." He pondered for a moment. "You're telling me this now because I'm engaged to Loretta?"

She nodded wretchedly. "Yes."

He didn't know what his own feelings were. The girl just sat there with her face averted. If she had even looked at him or tucked in a curl of her silver-blonde hair—it would have changed his feeling. That would have meant that her avowed emotion was not too deep to interfere with the conscious little businesses of being feminine.

But Wanda did nothing. She let him see her—drawn, sleepless, miserable, and utterly without hope.

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Presently she said, "I've succeeded in adding more weight to the burden you already carry. I think I would rather have died than have told you—what I just did."

"Taking a woman seriously," Tony replied after some time, "is not my habit. It's apt to drive you crazy. That's why I was certain to marry Loretta, or somebody like her. She'd be the first person to maintain that it was a mistake to take her with too much seriousness. In the office I try to look at people as people, and not as men and women. Again—that's why I wouldn't let myself think of you as anything but a secretary."

"I understand all those things."

"Sure, you do. Now."

She stood up, went to the door, opened it, looked back, and smiled slightly. His smile in response was just as slight.

He was still standing looking at the door through which the girl had gone when the intercom buzzed. "Señor and Señora Alavo would like to see you if you can spare the time, Mr. Andrews."

"Send them in."

The South American was tall and olive-tinged. He bought his clothes in England. His wife also was tall. She had long black hair heaped voluptuously at the back of the neck. Her clothes came from Paris. One could imagine the Alavos in any setting so long as it was extravagant; but the Alavos, as they entered Tony's office, did not look urbane.

Tony said, "Sit down. Cigarette, Señora? Cigar, Alavo?"

He held a match. Both of them were trembling.

"Naturally," said the South American, "I did not murder your partner, Mr. Cole."

"Mr. Cole favored acceptance of your bonds." Tony hesitated. "I was against the proposition."

Tony had been looking at Señora Alavo, his attention drawn to her by the mnemonic scent of the perfume she wore. It brought into his memory a picture of the sofa with a blood-soaked back.

Tony moved his eyes from her to the banker. "But no one has accused you of having anything to do with this tragedy."

"The police have been most polite." Alavo paused. "I assume that there is no further hope for my enterprise?"

Tony shook his head. "I was frank before, Alavo. I went down to South America and looked over the property and the reports. Your bank seemed sound—although there were plenty of rumors that it wasn't. I don't doubt that the ore in those mountains is worth a hundred times the sum you are trying to raise; but it's going to be expensive to get it out, and the market isn't stable."

Alavo nodded. "Your firm is the only one left to which I could go." He smiled briefly, ruefully. "My one hope of success was that Mr.

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Cole would override your veto." He shrugged. "Since I am now without a champion I will say to you, confidentially, that to return to my country without success will unquestionably mean the ruin of my bank as well as the mining corporation. My wife knew all these things. That's why she went, without my knowledge, to plead with Mr. Cole."

The woman stood up dramatically and cried out, "He was alive when I left him! I swear it!"

Alavo shouted, "Isabella! Be silent!" At that instant he was not a suave banker but a Latin husband giving orders to his Latin wife.

She sat down.

"This procedure"—Alavo was furious—"is, naturally, intolerable to me. I do not know what method my wife used in an attempt to persuade your partner—"

The woman began to cry.

Tony felt angry. "Look here, Alavo. If you came in here to show me how furious you were, or to punish your wife, you can get out right now. I'd like to ask your wife some questions and I'd rather you didn't go on making a fool of yourself."

Alavo was on his feet, white and trembling. "If you said that to me in South America, young man—"

"This isn't South America, Alavo, and you can go back to your chair and sit down—or get out." He said that because the banker was slowly tiptoeing toward him, in a delirium of rage. "Have you told the police?" Tony asked.

"Naturally not." The mention of police brought Alavo back to his senses. He sat down.

Tony turned his attention to the woman. "Just what did you do, señora?"

She answered dully, without glancing at her husband, "*He*—went to a dinner. He told me he would be back late. I was to dine in my room. I decided to see Mr. Cole myself. It was my intention to call on you also and on Mr. Boyd. I was afraid"—she shuddered—"of ruin. I telephoned Mr. Cole late in the afternoon to tell him I was coming to see him. I went to his apartment. He was very kind. He said he had no intention of giving up his position on our bond issue. He said that he expected to convince Mr. Boyd and override your veto. I couldn't have been there more than fifteen minutes."

"Where did you sit?" Tony asked.

Her dark eyes met his with surprise, but she had herself in hand. "I sat at the end of the sofa on which he was stabbed."

Alavo shouted, "How do you know which sofa he was stabbed on?"

She shrank from her husband but she answered steadily, "There have been diagrams of that room in the morning newspapers. Naturally, I realized Mr. Cole has been stabbed in the middle of the very sofa on which I had been sitting."

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Her statement checked with Tony's own observations. No doubt she perfumed her hair. "What time was it?"

"I left my room at the hotel at a quarter past eight last night."

"Say, from a quarter of nine till nine, then?"

"I should think so. It was about nine thirty when I returned. My husband was in my room waiting for me. He had deliberately lied to me about being out all the evening. He is jealous. He knew that I was acquainted with many people in New York." Ashamed and bitter, she pulled up one of her sleeves, and Tony saw on her wrist four ugly purple bruises.

That revelation again drove Alavo into a quivering rage.

Tony looked at him coldly and said, "You're an awful nice fellow, Alavo. You didn't by any chance follow your wife down to Dave's apartment, and go up there after she'd left and pick up my knife from that mess of fishing tackle and stab him?"

"He followed me, yes," the woman said.

Alavo slapped his wife on the mouth. The blow was fierce. She didn't cry out or faint, but merely covered her mouth with her hand. The South American stood up then and said through his clenched teeth, "Come, Isabella."

Rage of that sort is contagious. Tony didn't entertain even so minute a thought as that Alavo was a skunk. His brain merely stopped working. Nobody could sock a woman in his office.

Alavo was standing in front of him and Tony got up fast, bringing a haymaker with him. It knocked the banker backward. He collapsed in a chair—out cold.

Wanda Jones entered the room with a sheaf of letters in her hand.

Señora Alavo slowly shook her head and said, in a low, crazed tone, "But he didn't do it, Mr. Andrews. He was back in the hotel before I returned—and when I left Mr. Cole, the knife—and all that fishing tackle—were not on the table."

She wiped her mouth with a handkerchief, because it was bleeding.

Tony turned toward his secretary. "Take Señora Alavo to the washroom." The two women went out.

He stood over the unconscious South American, thinking. A month ago, when Alavo had first come up from South America, and before Tony had made his flying trip to investigate Alavo's property, there had been a cocktail party at Tony's apartment. Cole, Boyd, Alavo, his wife—the usual crowd.

Suppose Alavo had picked up the knife at that time? Picked it up, because it had a nick in it and could be identified? Alavo was desperate. He might even have thought that a murder would be necessary to save his cause.

But in that case, Tony thought, it would have been himself or

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Boyd, rather than Cole, whom Alavo would have killed.

He walked over to his desk and picked up his thermos carafe. He poured icy water on Alavo's face. As he was doing that Lieutenant Doyle walked through the door from the outer office and said, "What's going on here?"

Tony replied grimly, "Señor Alavo is out cold."

"You didn't kill him, did you?"

Tony glared. "I knocked him out. What are you doing here?"

Doyle bent over the South American. His eyes were still closed but he was moving. "I just wanted to talk things over with you."

Señor Alavo looked up into the policeman's face and then at Tony. He scrambled to his feet. "I've been framed! I didn't go into Cole's apartment! I sat outside in my car!"

The lieutenant said, "We've checked on you. We had your driver at the station for two hours this morning. And unless he's a better liar than most people, you didn't go into Cole's apartment."

Things began to happen very rapidly then. Wanda came in with Mrs. Alavo. Already frightened, she sank in terror on a chair when she saw the policeman.

Tony tried to explain. "The Alavos came down to tell me that Mrs. Alavo had gone to Dave's apartment last night. They had a family row and he socked her, so I socked him."

Doyle smiled mirthlessly at Tony. "You knew I was outside, and when this alibi fell in your lap you put it on ice with a good, hard right. You think awfully fast, Mr. Andrews. It just happens that we think a little faster down at headquarters. This time I've got a warrant."

"What warrant?" Tony said.

"The warrant for your arrest for the murder of David Cole. Mr. Boyd called us last night. We didn't just go busting into Cole's apartment. McCluskey and I got into the one below and climbed up to the balcony above and looked in the window. We were watching you in the living room."

He turned to Miss Jones. "You, too, Miss Jones—and we'll take you along as a material witness. You see, we got there just before you arrived on the scene."

Wanda drew in a shivering breath.

Alavo walked over to his wife and took her arm. "We may leave?"

Doyle nodded. "I'll be up at your hotel to talk to you later this afternoon."

Tony was looking at this lieutenant. His mind ran like a speeded-up motion picture. They had seen him in Dave's living room, wearing gloves. They had seen him pull out the knife. They had heard all his conversation with Wanda. No doubt they thought that, having been surprised by his secretary, he had smoothly lied out of his predicament.

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Doyle's next words revealed the accuracy of that guess. "You've gotten yourself in a lot of trouble by falling for your boss, Miss *Temple!*"

The girl sat down. "So you found that out . . . already."

"It was a cinch! Come on, Andrews. Come on, Miss Temple. Apparently you take after your father."

The cruelty of that remark sent so violent an emotion through Tony that he would have knocked out the lieutenant as he stood there, if Wanda hadn't managed to grab his arm.

Doyle didn't waste any more time. He pulled out his gun; he handcuffed Tony; he directed them to walk through the outer office. Into the consternation caused by his appearance, handcuffed, Tony bawled one order: "We're being arrested! Get Raymond, somebody!"

(*Continued on page 143*)

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Even if you don't believe a word of this story,
it will get under your skin
—the way it got under ours . . .

THE VICTIM OF COINCIDENCE

by ROBERT TWOHY

MRS. HENRY LUCKETT WENT down the cellar steps with a terrible clatter. It sounded to Mr. Luckett just like a garbage can rolling down the steps.

Mr. Luckett stood at the top of the cellar steps and looked down. It was a long flight of steps, and it was dim down there—but he could see the mound of her body. In her unpleasant pink bathrobe.

Mr. Luckett went down the steps carefully. He stood a moment, looking thoughtfully at the twisted form. He rubbed his chin, and nodded.

"Broken neck," he said.

He didn't touch the body. He knew that when there is violent death, you aren't supposed to touch the body. He knew this very well.

He went back up the steps, into the living room of the small, old, shabby house, and after a brief study of the telephone book he dialed.

"Is Lieutenant Chambers on duty, please? . . . Good evening, Lieutenant. This is Henry Luckett. Yes. I'm very well, thank you. The reason I called, Lieutenant, is that Mrs. Luckett just fell down the cellar stairs."

He listened. He nodded. "Yes, I'm afraid so. Yes. No, I won't touch anything. I never do."

Mr. Luckett went into the kitchen, got the percolator, and carefully prepared it for coffee. He put it on the stove. In a few moments it started to bubble.

Mr. Luckett stood there, listening to the cheerful sound of the bubbling coffee, and there was a gentle smile on his lips.

They had come, investigated, photographed, questioned, and now they were gone—the police and the Coroner's man and the reporters; and the body of Mrs. Henry Luckett was also gone. But Lieutenant Chambers, a thin man in a neat dark suit, remained.

He sat on the couch in the cluttered living room and drew on his cigarette, and looked at Mr. Luckett with deep, thoughtful eyes.

"Four times. Four wives, four violent deaths."

Mr. Luckett, small and plump, sat very still, his soft little hands

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lying quietly on his knees. He looked back at the Lieutenant with his mild blue eyes. Mr. Luckett's eyes were the eyes of a man who, seeing a spider on the wall, meticulously picks it up on the edge of a piece of paper and carries it out the door.

"I could understand," said Chambers, "if it was for money. But it's not. The first one was, of course—that's how you got rich. But the last three left you nothing—not even any insurance. Why do you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Murder them."

"But I don't. It's coincidence. My life is dominated by eerie coincidences."

"Four wives, four violent deaths. Entirely too much coincidence."

"Do you really think so? I have a theory: some men are accident-prone; I am coincidence-prone. That's the essence of it."

"You're playing with me, Mr. Luckett. It's a dangerous game. But that's its fascination for you, isn't it? I'm beginning to understand you a little. After ten years I'm beginning to understand you a little."

"Ten years. Has it been that long?"

"Ten years since I first met you. After the death of your second wife."

"How time rushes by! But then, I never think of time . . . poor Rosalie."

"I investigated that death. The first time I talked to you, Mr. Luckett, I knew you were a murderer."

Mr. Luckett smiled. "And what made you imagine that?"

"You let me know. With little hints, subtleties—you planted the knowledge that it hadn't been an accident, that you'd murdered her. Just as you did the third time, and again tonight. You're a subtle man, Mr. Luckett—too subtle."

"I? Not I."

"A very subtle man. Also a psychopath. Do you know that?"

"I think you misjudge me."

"Do I?" Chambers held up a forefinger. "Sixteen years ago, your first wife. She was driving down a hill road, the steering wheel jammed in some way—inexplicable. Someone saw her fighting the wheel, but she couldn't turn it and went off the road, down the cliff. The damage was so complete that it was impossible to tell if the wheel had been tampered with . . . She was an heiress. You inherited a big enough fortune to last you the rest of your life."

The Lieutenant held up his middle finger alongside the first. "Ten years ago, your second wife. She fell from a third-story window. In broad daylight. Nobody saw it, of course."

"Poor Rosalie. Do you know, I think I liked Rosalie best of all."

Chambers held up a third finger. "Four years ago, your third wife. She fell down these same cellar steps."

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He held up his fourth finger. "Now, tonight—your fourth . . . Do I misjudge you? I don't think so. Coincidence doesn't stretch that far. It can't, Mr. Luckett—it just can't!"

"That is your opinion. But the point, of course, is simply this: do you have a case?"

"I may have. Consider G. J. Smith, and the Brides in the Bath."

Mr. Luckett nodded. "You were kind enough to mention that interesting true case the last time we talked. But of course there is no parallel, no real parallel. Mr. Smith was a murderer. I am a victim of coincidence. It was no coincidence that he purchased those tin bathtubs that his brides would drown in. It was no coincidence that he profited financially by the death of each one. It was no coincidence that he flitted about from place to place in England, changing his name. Mr. Smith was a criminal type—it was obvious—and he deserved to hang. But I am a wealthy man who has stayed put in the same house these past sixteen years. I purchased no odd objects. I did not profit from all four deaths. I have never changed my name. No real parallel, you see . . . Do you know, I think that even if *another* wife should fall down these same cellar steps, you still wouldn't have a case."

After a long silence Lieutenant Chambers said, in a thin voice, "Are you suggesting that you plan to use those cellar steps *again*?"

"It's happened twice. Could anyone be sure—I mean, really *sure*, beyond a shadow of doubt—that it couldn't happen *again*?"

"You," said Chambers, "are a very sick man."

He got up. Mr. Luckett got up too, and held the door open.

"Come again. We'll talk, and you can try to penetrate what you think is this sick mind of mine, and I can imagine that I am a kind of criminal genius, and we can play this game together . . . What is life without illusions, anyway? We all construct little secret playrooms, little fantasy worlds in which we escape from reality . . . Yes, come again, Lieutenant. I assure you, coincidence will continue to rule my life. I am fated. Lieutenant?" He had to raise his voice—he stood in the doorway and Chambers had reached the bottom of the porch. "There's one other thing, one other coincidence you may find amusing."

"Well?"

"My name is Henry, you know. Did you know that I am the eighth Henry Joseph Luckett?"

"The eiththh?"

"Yes. Henry the Eighth. He had six wives, you know. Perhaps—who knows?—coincidence will order that I too will have six wives."

And he smiled his gentle smile.

Lieutenant Chambers, in private session with the District Attorney, said, "The man is a multiple murderer."

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The District Attorney, a small, cold, legal-looking man, tapped a pencil on his desk. "Maybe he is. So what's the procedure?"

Chambers spread his hands. Then he let them drop. He shook his head.

The District Attorney said, "Evidence. You don't have any. You have two wives falling down a flight of steps—"

"And two wives who died violently before them."

"All stretched out over a span of sixteen years. And no motive for the last three. Nothing but coincidence."

"Coincidence." Chambers laughed a hollow laugh. "So what do we do? Let him go on?"

"We're not avenging angels. We're officers of the law. A mason can't build a wall without cement, no matter how much he wants to build a wall. Bring me some cement."

"I can't. There isn't any."

"Then we can't build a wall. It's as simple as that."

Chambers got up, and paced. "You're right. But it's got me talking to myself. I can't think of anything else . . . You know why? Because *I'm* the motive. Yes, me. I'm why he kills them."

"You?"

"That's right. What I represent. Society, the law. It's a battle between him and me. He kills them so he can laugh at me."

"Fantastic, Lieutenant!"

"I know it. But that's why he does it. The murder is incidental to the thrill he gets out of the victory over me. We both know it, he and I. Time? It's nothing to him—he's as patient as Job. He sits and waits . . . I suppose I sound like a raving madman myself. Well, maybe I am. Maybe he's right. Maybe coincidence makes more sense than what I'm saying . . . He's an empty little man. He got a fortune at age thirty-two and had nothing to do with the rest of his life. He bought a rundown old house and he sits in there like a spider in his web, living his private life, in his mind, thinking of himself, as Napoleon, as a master criminal, laughing at society, plotting against society, the law, knowing that each of these murders is a victory over society and the law, making him a kind of Emperor . . . Henry the Eighth. Does that make any sense?"

"Maybe it would. To a headshrinker."

"Right. I'm out of my depth. Anyway, he's too smart for me. You know how he kills them? He pushes them—that's all there is to it. What could be simpler? He doesn't waste time smearing oil or butter on their shoes or putting up strings to trip them . . . He just pushes. He has the subtlety to be absolutely simple."

Chambers stared out the window. He said bleakly, "He'll marry again. Maybe not right away, but he'll marry again. He's shooting for six, you know—I'm sure of it."

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"Ridiculous. He couldn't murder six women and keep on calling it accident. That would be just too much. Too much."

"But four isn't?" Chambers gave him a frosty smile. "Four isn't too much?"

It was some months later that Lieutenant Chambers ran into Mr. Luckett downtown.

Mr. Luckett smiled—his gentle smile—and said, "Lieutenant! So nice to see you again. How have you been?"

"I've been all right. How are coincidences, Mr. Luckett?"

"Coincidences dominate me, as always. Not unpleasant ones always, fortunately. Do you know that a most astonishing thing happened to me last month?"

Chambers felt a sinking in his stomach. It was Mr. Luckett's smile, and the lilt in his voice, that made Chambers' stomach sink.

"I was in Chicago," said Mr. Luckett. "One of the great cities in the world, you know. And in this great city, full of women, who should I run into? One particular woman . . . Do you remember I happened to mention, the last time we talked, that I was the eighth Henry?"

"I remember."

"This woman who touched the particular string that runs to my heart is named Catherine."

"Catherine?"

"Catherine, yes. If you recall your history, you will recall that Catherine was Henry's fifth wife."

He stood there, nodding and smiling.

Lieutenant Chambers said in a low voice, "I recall also that Henry arranged for the death of his fifth wife."

"I believe you are right. I wish you hadn't reminded me of that. A disturbing thought. A most disturbing thought."

"So you're setting it up again?"

"I'm married again, sir. Is there a law against a widower remarrying?"

"You're a lunatic, Mr. Luckett."

"Please, Lieutenant, keep your voice down. Someone might hear—then I might have to sue you for slander."

"How long? How long will she live? Will you go on a few years, or will you strike soon? Maybe it's getting out of your control. Maybe you can't stand waiting, like the other times. Maybe you'll feel the irresistible urge to strike suddenly . . . Maybe you're cracking up. Has that ever occurred to you?"

Mr. Luckett's face was calm and gentle as always. "I hope not, Lieutenant. I look forward to a long and pleasant life with my new bride. Of course, I of all men know my fatal attraction to coincidence—tragic coincidence. How long? A lifetime, I hope. Still—none of us has a contract with the hereafter."

"It had better not be the cellar steps."

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"That would be an awesome coincidence, wouldn't it? Awesome. And still . . ." He shrugged, and rolled his eyes upward, and shook his head.

Chambers said, "I'm going to pay an official call on your wife. I'm going to tell her about those cellar steps—and about your past."

"I'd be delighted to have you meet her. Of course you should know that anything you choose to tell her she already knows from me. She is well aware of the danger she runs—the danger of coincidence."

"You told her?"

"Naturally. Everything."

"And she still married you? She must be stupid," Chambers said flatly.

"Everything is relative," said Mr. Luckett. "Each of us, no matter how much intelligence he may have, is stupid in comparison with . . . someone else."

Mr. Luckett, sitting at dinner with his thin, brown-haired wife, said, "A Lieutenant Chambers of the police will be calling on you."

"Oh?"

"Lieutenant Chambers has a fascinating theory about me. He believes I am a multiple murderer."

Mr. Luckett spoke lightly. He dipped his spoon into his tapioca, then sucked the spoon delicately. He smiled up at his wife.

She did not smile back. "Are you joking, Henry?"

"Not at all. He has professional reasons for thinking that. My past is, by his lights, sinister."

"Coincidence. Just a series of horrible coincidences."

"He's not a believer in coincidences, my dear. He's really quite an intelligent man. I have no objection to his telling you anything he wishes to."

"I don't want to talk to him."

"He wants to talk to you." Mr. Luckett spooned more tapioca. "He wants to talk particularly about the cellar steps. He will warn you about them. He will suggest that I may push you down them. He will say it could happen to you—anytime . . ." He looked down at his dish a moment, and his eyes were thoughtful. Then he raised his eyes to her. "Are you afraid of me, Catherine?"

"No. No, of course not."

"But consider it . . . isn't it strange? Isn't it something to cause uneasiness? A widower four times, and the last two wives dying from falls down the same cellar steps?"

He watched her, and he was smiling his gentle smile. "I was fond of all my wives, you know . . . but they died. You could die too. Whether he's right—whether I'm a murderer or whether astonishing coincidence has me in its clutches—you could die too."

She was quiet, looking back at him. Then she shook her head. "It's all nonsense, Henry. You're not a murderer, and as for coincidence—why should it strike again? I mean—

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anyone can die. Because four have died by accidents doesn't mean I'm going to die the same way."

"Of course not," said Mr. Luckett. "But that's the fascinating thing about coincidence—it's so unpredictable. You just can't predict anything about it."

And he spooned up the last of his tapioca.

Two days later Lieutenant Chambers rang. It was mid-afternoon.

Mrs. Luckett opened the door. He had an impression of a thin white face, and a tight mouth. She stood very stiff, staring at him.

"Mrs. Luckett? I'm Lieutenant Chambers. Perhaps your husband—"

"Yes." She put her hand to her white cheek. "He told me you would come. How strange! He was right."

She went into the living room, the small living room, not so cluttered now. Lieutenant Chambers followed her, saying, "Strange, Mrs. Luckett? What's strange?"

"Coincidence. Your coming at this moment, at this very moment . . . He was right, you know. Coincidence did rule his life."

She sat down and closed her eyes. Her thin hands lay limp on the arms of the chair.

Chambers said in a sharp voice, "*Did* rule his life? What do you mean, *did* rule his life?"

She shook her head, and made a slight gesture with her hand.

He strode to the kitchen. The cellar door was open. He took two steps down, then paused. He saw a twisted form at the bottom of the steps.

He went down the steps, and knelt by the body of Mr. Luckett. He lifted the plump hand, felt for the pulse, then let the hand fall to the floor.

He went back to the living room. She was sitting as before.

"What happened?"

"He went down for a screwdriver . . . I heard him cry out, then the terrible crash. I went to see . . . I didn't go down. I knew he was dead."

"How did you know?"

"You know. You know by the way they lie there."

The piano was near. Lieutenant Chambers took a step back to it, put his hands on it, and leaned on it, quite hard. It was something solid and secure. He felt the need of something solid and secure.

She said, "This isn't the first time for me. I never told Henry—I knew it would alarm him . . . the fantastic coincidence of it all!"

"Of what all?"

"I was bereaved four times—just as he was."

Lieutenant Chambers said, after a long silence, "How did you two meet?"

"It was strange . . . there was a concert. In Chicago. We both got the same seat."

"The same seat?"

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"They made an error, in the printing office. They printed two identical tickets. They told us later it had never happened before . . . That was how we met."

Lieutenant Chambers sat down on the couch. He waved his hat gently in front of his face.

"So he found you, and you found him. Out of all the people in Chicago, in the world . . . The printing office made an error—for the first time—and you found each other."

He rolled his eyes upward. "I believe you, Mr. Luckett," he said grimly. "You were right. Righter than you knew. I truly do believe you now."

"I have," said Mrs. Luckett, "found that some people's lives have a pattern of strange coincidence. All my husbands—can you believe it, even as I tell you?—all my husbands died from falling down a flight of steps . . ."

Lieutenant Chambers suddenly felt like screaming.

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It is with heavy hearts that we face our electric typewriter and tap out these sad words . . . Is this the final adventure of The Great Detective, The Master Manhunter, the one and only Schlock Homes? Is it possible? Is it bearable? What a schlock—we mean shock—to our sensibilities! Or will there be, miraculously, a "return"? We can only fervently hope so and we can only hope that the voice of the people will make itself heard throughout the length, breadth, and thickness of Detectivedom (or, more clearly stated, that enough of you will pick up pen, pencil, or stylus and ask—nay, demand—that Schlock Homes ride again!) But if, in point of truth, this proves to be the last adventure (or memoir), then we cannot refrain from calling your attention to the fact that The Great Man goes out in a blaze of glory to the accompaniment of two of the most outrageous puns ever perpetrated in the name of Parody-Pastiche . . .

THE ADVENTURE OF THE FINAL PROBLEM

by ROBERT L. FISH

IT WAS IN THE FATEFUL YEAR OF '62 that I first began to notice what the many years of sacrifice and profound mental effort had inflicted on my friend Mr. Schlock Homes. Aggravated by the lingering effects of those early days when he was a Coke addict, and brought to a climax by his more recent habit of filter tips, the signs were all too plainly noticeable. It was with a heavy heart that I advised Homes that unless he saw fit to take a complete rest from his labours, I should not care to speak for the consequences.

I had first noted his looking seedy in early May of that year, and had attributed it at the time to an increase in his consumption of pomegranates. When this was replaced in his diet with watermelon and no improvement ensued, I knew there was no choice left but to plan a complete cessation of his activities, and the passing of at least the summer in absolute relaxation on the continent.

To this end, therefore, we packed our bags early in June of '62 and departed our quarters at 221B Bagel Street for our European sojourn. In line with my strict admonition, Homes left all elements pertaining to his profession behind, taking with him only the barest minimum of clothing and, of course, his beloved violin. The newly formed

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Flying Squad of Scotland Yard, led by Inspector "Hansom" East himself, escorted us from our rooms to Victoria Station, and Homes was quite touched by this mark of esteem.

We passed an idyllic month on the Costa Brava, at a little town just north of Cape Oeuf-de-Grasse. In this time Homes's appearance improved greatly; his weight rose to ten stone and the old sparkle returned to his eyes. Although at first he seemed to evidence signs of restlessness at his enforced idleness, in time he proved to be an ideal patient, whiling away his hours in the healthy sunlight that flooded the sidewalk cafés, and even playing his violin for the musical connoisseurs who frequented those places.

Nor, oddly enough, did he seem to lack for funds. Although we had left London with proscribed purses, he appeared to be in excellent financial shape, even going so far as to augment his meager wardrobe with a new hat, a very fine white cane, and a quite attractive pair of dark glasses.

But even the Costa Brava began to pall. The appreciation—I assume he meant "musical"—of his listeners, Homes said, was declining, and for this reason I readily fell in with his suggestion that we continue along the Riviera to what Homes called, in his literary manner, "new hunting grounds."

The following morning, therefore, found us up and out of the hotel before dawn, and Homes demonstrated his vastly improved physical condition by sliding from our room, even burdened by our bags, on a rope placed there, apparently, for that purpose. Minutes later we were driving our trap smartly along the lovely winding road that skirts the blue Mediterranean.

But the pleasant relaxation of our holiday was not to continue, for in the picturesque principality of Monaco fortune contrived to involve Homes in a case which I record here with heavy hand.

We had arrived in the early afternoon and immediately set about finding quarters. Cheap rooms, however, were not to be had, and in the end we were forced to accept a suite in a major hotel at a quite disgraceful rate. Homes, however, waved the cost aside, and once our bags had been deposited there, picked up his violin and announced his intention of inspecting the local sidewalk cafés. I attempted to point out to him that it was quite late in the day, and that the beneficial rays of the sun would shortly disappear; but Homes was adamant.

We had threaded our way through the densest part of the throng before the Chez Guavara when of a sudden a hand shot out of the crowd, reaching up from a table to grasp Homes's coat sleeve. A voice cried out in pleased surprise.

"Mr. Homes! And Doctor Watney! How fortunate to have encountered you in this fashion—why,

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we have been searching for you!"

We turned to find ourselves facing none other than Inspector "Hansom" East, whom we had thought safely back in England. He drew us hastily into two empty seats at his table and with a swift glance about, leaned forward and spoke in a confidential low voice.

"Mr. Homes, the Flying Squad at this moment is engaged in checking every village along the Corniche for you. Although you are not aware of it, your brother Criscroft in the Home Office has arranged that my services be placed at the disposal of the authorities here in an effort to solve a problem of the most dire consequences. And only you can help me find the answer."

Homes looked with a slight frown at the eager face confronting us.

"I shall be honest with you, Inspector," he said slowly. "I have more or less decided to abandon the art of detection for all time. This holiday has opened my eyes to far greater possibilities for, shall we say, a richer life."

I am afraid that my mouth gaped at these words. The Inspector's face fell.

"Mr. Homes," he said fervently, "it is vital that you aid us—at least, in this one last case. England has given her word to Monaco that this affair will be clarified, and it would look poor indeed for the British Lion were we to fail."

Homes's eyebrows went up. "Very well, then," he said with small enthusiasm. "In that case it appears I have little choice. Pray favor us with the details."

The Inspector sighed with relief. "I knew you would not let us down, Mr. Homes. Well, then, the story is simply this: as you know, the Casino here at Monte Carlo is the principal source of revenue for the country, and it is to the interest of the Western Powers that Monaco remain free and solvent. We are, therefore, most interested in the continued success of the Casino. Yet, Mr. Homes, all this is now in grave jeopardy."

Despite his air of indifference I could sense a quickening of interest in my friend at these words. He leaned forward. "In which way?" he enquired quietly.

"Hansom" East glanced about secretively to make certain we were not being overheard. "Mr. Homes, of late there have been a mysterious series of rapping and chipping sounds from somewhere beneath the floor at night in the Casino. These frightening noises are clearly audible in the gaming rooms. The Directors have attempted to explain them to the players as merely the rumblings of an incipient earthquake in the neighborhood, but it is doubtful if this thin excuse can serve for very long." He bent closer, wringing his hands.

"Mr. Homes, there is every indication that the Casino is haunted! I need not describe to you how disastrous it would be if this fact

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were to be disclosed. Gamblers being notoriously superstitious, the gaming tables could lose their custom within a week, and the entire country fall into bankruptcy. The blow to the Western Powers in that event would be incalculable."

Homes received this information with narrowed eyes as his brilliant mind encompassed the problem in all its ramifications. "You have investigated the possibility of human agency?"

The Inspector shook his head. "The Casino employees flatly refused to do so, and frankly, I have been so busy searching for you that I have not had the time. However, I believe you can rule out the likelihood of any human agency; it is hard to conceive of a person so unpatriotic as to threaten our national security for any urge so minor as that of frightening people. No, Mr. Homes, only some awesome supernatural phenomenon can explain this mysterious affair."

"Your logic appears unimpeachable," Homes admitted, and pushed himself to his feet. "However, I suggest we repair to the Casino itself, where we will be better able to test the validity of your theory."

To this end we left the café, with Homes still grasping his violin tightly. Our trap being the closest, the three of us climbed in and I handled the reins as the Inspector gave directions. Homes leaned back, his fingers tented, his broad forehead wrinkled in concentration.

Within a few minutes we were entering the curved driveway and drawing up before the broad marble stairway leading to the gambling salon where, as the Inspector had so clearly explained, the freedom and liberty of us all was being protected. The Inspector began to usher us into the building, but Homes desisted.

"If you do not mind, Inspector," he said, "I should prefer to begin my inspection with the grounds. If you would be so kind as to explain my presence to the Directors, I shall meet you later in the office and we can discuss my findings."

"Very well, Mr. Homes," the Inspector agreed. "And may good fortune attend your search."

As soon as the Inspector had disappeared within, Homes began to circle the huge building, his sharp eyes noting each crevice and cranny in the walls. Suddenly he stopped short and grasped my arm tightly.

"There, Watney!" he whispered in great excitement. "Do you see it?"

"See what, Homes?" I whispered back, and then cleared my throat. "See what, Homes?"

"That hidden door!" he exclaimed, and hurried forward.

Sure enough, there was a small portal obscured by the tall bushes that edged our path. Bending to it with picklock in hand, Homes soon had it open and we crept within.

We faced a dusky passage lighted only by a series of small bulbs which

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were operated, as Homes correctly deduced, by a small light switch beside the entrance. Motioning me to silence, the great detective edged slowly forward. A sharp turn in the passage brought us face to face with a second door, and once again Homes applied himself to the lock. Moments later the portal had surrendered to Homes's mastery and we passed within.

We were in a room that had, apparently, once served as some type of storeroom. Abandoned accoutrement of gambling were scattered about; moldy divans and hassocks filled one wall. Against a second wall there was propped, diagonally, the upper portion of a wooden bunk-bed, which had been wrenched from its mating part and leaned almost vertically against the plaster. The mattress had been removed from this affair, and the many wooden bed-slats formed a ladder-like arrangement. The remainder of the broken bed was scattered about the floor.

Homes's eyes raised to the ceiling; a hole had been started just above the bed, and bits of chipped concrete lay about on the floor where they had fallen.

For fully five minutes Homes studied this scene, his keen eyes examining every bit of the small room, but particularly the broken bed leaning upright against the wall. When at last he turned to me, his face—to my utter astonishment—was contorted with pity.

"Poor chap!" he murmured. His fine eyes came up to mine, compassion flooding them. "Let this be a lesson to you, Watney, even as it has been to me. When the Inspector expounded his theory of a supernatural agency at work, I could find no flaw in it. And yet, here before us, is the proof that the agency was human indeed. But in sad shape, poor chap!"

"But, Homes," I exclaimed. "I do not understand this at all. I see nothing to indicate human occupation here,—and I certainly do not comprehend your reiteration of the phrase 'poor chap'."

"No, Watney?" He smiled sadly. "And yet it is all here for us to see. The man who made those sounds in the night had no thought of disturbing those above; he was merely seeking to alleviate his own distress, for he suffers great physical misfortune. Not only does he endure the tortures of a serious back ailment, but it is also obvious that he is a victim of asthma. This, plus his greatly straitened circumstances, merit my calling him 'poor chap'." He turned to study the ragged hole begun in the ceiling. "There is but one further point to check in order to prove everything—but there can be little doubt of the truth."

"But, Homes," I began. My friend, however, was paying no attention. Instead, he had whipped out a pad and pencil and was busy taking measurements in the room and marking them down. When he

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was finished he grasped his violin and strode down the passageway, noting the number of paces and their direction. He added this information to his notes, thrust the pad into his waistcoat pocket, and turned to me.

"Come, Watney," he said. "Let us visit the office and check the location of that hole in the ceiling. Unless I am greatly mistaken, we will find it was intended to break into a fresh-air duct."

The Inspector was sitting with two of the Directors when we entered the large office. At sight of Homes he sprang to his feet, but Homes waved him to silence with a strong hand.

"Gentleman," he asked, "would it be possible for you to furnish me with the architectural plans for this building?"

The Directors were obviously puzzled by this request, but one of them immediately withdrew the plans from a drawer and handed them over. The tall detective spread them out upon a desk and began to make rapid calculations. At last his strong, thin finger came down upon a spot.

"Gentlemen," he said with quiet satisfaction. "Am I correct in assuming that these lines indicate an air duct?"

The Directors bent over the table. "That is the vault you have your finger on," one replied.

Homes's face fell, but only for an instant as his genius considered this new fact. "Tell me, gentlemen," he said softly. "Is the vault *air-conditioned?*"

"Why, yes, it is, Mr. Homes," the Director replied, surprised.

The Inspector leaned forward anxiously. "Have you found something, Mr. Homes?"

There was a moment's silence before my friend answered. "Gentlemen," he said at last, "I can guarantee you the cessation of the noises which have been frightening your clients. But it will cost you ten thousand francs, and you must ask no questions."

The Inspector's face lighted up. "Mr. Homes, you are wonderful! The money is no problem. But how . . . ?"

"No questions!" Homes repeated sternly. He accepted the packet of banknotes handed to him by one of the Directors and bowed slightly. "Thank you, gentlemen. And now, good day. Come, Watney."

He waved away the enthusiastic thanks of the three men and led me out of the building. I started toward our trap, but Homes's firm hand turned me from my path in the direction of the small portal hidden in the thick bushes. I pulled back violently.

"What now, Homes?" I asked in annoyance. "You may go your way alone. I have been patient with all your mystification, for I know this is your conceit; but when you accept money for aiding your country, I will have no part of it!"

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"No, no, Watney," he said softly. "You do not understand. The money is not for me; it is for the poor soul who has been forced to bury his misery in that tiny warren. Come, we must wait for him. As we do so, I shall explain everything."

We drew back into the heavier of the thick bushes where our presence could not be noticed, while still affording us vision of the small door. Homes turned to me.

"The answer to this entire problem lay in that broken bunk-bed, Watney," he said. "Mute though it be, it spoke volumes. As soon as I saw it I began to cast about for reasons, not only for its condition, but also for its position almost upended against the wall. And then suddenly the pieces fell into place, and I saw the only combination of circumstances that could account for all the facts."

His voice saddened. "That the hapless fellow was in straitened circumstances was obvious. You know the difficulty we had in finding a hotel room, and had our purse been less full, we might have been reduced, as this poor man was, to seek clandestine lodgings where we would. That the unhappy soul suffered from a back injury was evident from the fact that he had eschewed the softer divans and had in fact even removed the mattress to leave the hard support of the bed slats. As you know from your medical knowledge, Watney, only a hard surface such as this would serve to give him any small modicum of relief."

"True," I admitted, entranced as always when Homes explained his remarkable deductions. "But Homes, how could you know that he also suffered from asthma?"

"By the position of the bed, Watney—it was very nearly upright. I am sure that you yourself have often recommended this position to sufferers of asthma. And when I saw the attempt at making a hole in the ceiling, and learned that it led to a source of cool, fresh air, my case was complete." He smiled. "With this ten thousand francs, however, I am sure the poor chap can arrange more comfortable quarters and need no longer unwittingly frighten the Casino clientele."

I clasped his hand. "Homes, forgive me!"

"Hush," he commanded. At first I thought it only an exhibition of his modesty, but then I saw he was peering intently through the darkness. "Here he comes."

A figure was approaching, staying well into the shadows. It paused in front of the small door to glance backwards. Homes's hand tightened on my arm.

"It is Professor Marty!" he whispered, and shook his head sadly. "There, Watney, is the proof that crime does not pay, for the Professor must have gained millions in his years as the leading criminal of all Europe, yet he is reduced to this unhappy end!"

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"What do you intend to do, Homes?" I whispered back.

"Despite our differences in the past, I cannot help but feel pity for one in his sad circumstances," Homes replied warmly. "It is obvious that he no longer represents a threat to society. I shall therefore give him the money and wish him Godspeed."

He stepped from the bushes, confronting the crouching figure at the door.

"Professor!" Homes called in a kindly voice. "All is known. Please accept . . ."

But before Homes could finish, the tall red-haired man had whirled about wildly and was dashing around the building.

"After him!" Homes cried. "In his desperate condition there is no telling what measures he may take."

Without loosening his grip upon his violin case, he dashed for the front of the building with me in hot pursuit. A carriage was disappearing through the curved entrance to the grounds; without pause Homes flung himself into our trap, grasping my hand and pulling me into the moving vehicle even as he cracked the whip over our startled steed.

"He cannot have gotten far!" Homes cried, leaning over our horse and snapping the whip in his ears. "There is but one road, and with any luck we shall overtake him in minutes."

We fled up the rocky winding road, our horse straining at the bit, his hooves pounding the pavement wildly. I huddled in one corner attempting to catch my breath while Homes, like some figure out of mythology, leaned over the frightened beast and cracked the whip madly in his ears. Beyond the sharp cliff on our side, the rocks fell sheer to the dashing waves far below.

We curved with the road, our wheels scraping loudly against the low stone wall that bordered the drive and held us back from the precipitous drop to the sea. Suddenly Homes was straining desperately at the reins, pulling our terrified horse to a panting stop.

"The Professor!" he cried, pointing to a trap that had come to a stop on the road before us. "He has a flat wheel! Come, now is the time to give him the money."

He sprang down and hurried forward, but the figure kneeling at the wheel of the wheel was equally as quick—a remarkable circumstance considering his many physical infirmities. Before Homes could reach him, the figure had come to his feet, reached within his carriage, and a second later was confronting my friend with a long sword in his hand.

"Homes, you are a devil!" he gasped. "How did you know?"

"The broken wooden bunk-bed," Homes replied calmly. "Come, Professor . . ."

"Then you shall die!" cried the

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wrathful figure. "You shall not live to reveal me as the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo!"

And with no further word he sprang forward, his sword weaving dangerously in the still night air.

But he had not counted upon the lightning reactions of Schlock Homes. With a leap Homes was at our trap, had snatched open his violin case, and was reaching within. For one horrified moment I feared he meant to defend himself with his beloved Amati; but then I saw he had withdrawn the hardened ash bow and was springing back into the roadway to defend himself with it against the crazed Professor.

"You misunderstand, Professor," Homes called sharply, but the whistling blade of the other almost cut off his words. There was nothing for it but to defend himself. "Stand back, Watney," he cried to me. "I can handle this. I merely mean to disarm the poor fellow."

Would that I had words to describe that fearsome duel! Homes with nothing more than the slim horsehair-strung violin bow, tipped with dainty ivory; while the Professor was armed with the latest type of buttonless foil. Back and forth they swayed, their breath loud and rasping in the night. Thrice the Professor drove Homes against the very ledge of the sheer drop, and thrice Homes, with a dazzling display of bowmanship, forced the action away from the brink.

And then, so quickly that the eye could scarcely follow, Homes flicked his wooden weapon hard against the guard of the other's sword, and with a sudden twist sent the foil spinning from his hand and flying over the edge of the precipice.

The Professor gave a gasp of dismay and lunged forward in a frantic effort to recover his lost blade; and before we knew it he was teetering on the very edge, waving his arms madly in an effort to save his equilibrium.

We both sprang forward to help—but it was too late. With a hoarse shriek that still echoes in my ears to this day, the huge red-haired figure lost his balance and fell into the abyss. His fearsome screams diminished as he fell; then sudden silence held as we stood above, frozen with horror. I turned at once to my friend.

"Are you all right, Homes?" I asked anxiously, and then paused in astonishment, for there were tears in his eyes. "Homes? What is it? You must not blame yourself, for you did everything in your power to help the poor man."

"No, no, Watney," he began, but I continued, hoping to ease the pain etched on his fine face.

"And also," I added, "the sounds at night in the Casino will now cease and that is all that matters. You have preserved our English way of life—indeed, Western civilization—and that is no small thing."

"You do not understand, Wat-

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ney," he said with a tragic catch in his voice. "Not that. This!"

And he held before my sight the battered remains of the weapon with which he had defended himself so valorously. The long shaft of wood was badly scarred and twisted from the violence of the struggle, and the white horsehair strands were completely severed and fluttering helplessly in the air.

Suddenly I saw the devastating truth. "Homes!" I cried aghast. "You mean . . . ?"

"Yes, Watney," he sobbed, the tears now coursing freely down the crevices of his face. "It was my last bow!"

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A curious and haunting little mystery which we do not want you to miss . . . strangely enough, we cannot find any record of this story having been published previously in the United States—unless it was published in some book or magazine we have not been able to trace, and then the very print itself disappeared completely from every page extant . . .

THE SHOP THAT EXCHANGED EVILS

by LORD DUNSANY

I OFTEN THINK OF THE BUREAU d'Echange de Maux and the wondrously evil old man that sat therein. It stood in a little street in Paris, its doorway made of three brown beams of wood, the top one overlapping the others like the Greek letter pai, all the rest painted green, a house far lower and narrower than its neighbors and infinitely stranger, a place to take one's fancy. And over the doorway on the old brown beam in faded yellow letters this legend ran: *Bureau Universel d'Echange de Maux.*

I entered at once and accosted the listless man who lolled on a stool by his counter. I demanded the wherefore of his wonderful shop, what evil wares he exchanged, and many other things I wished to know, for curiosity led me: and indeed had it not, I would have gone at once from the shop, for there was so evil a look in that fattened man, in the hang of his fallen cheeks and his sinful eye, that you would have said he had had dealings with Hell and won the advantage by sheer wickedness.

Such a man was the shopkeeper, but above all, the evil of him lay in his eyes, which lay so still, so apathetic, that you would have sworn he was drugged or dead; like lizards motionless on a wall they lay, then suddenly they darted, and all his cunning flamed up and revealed itself in what one moment before seemed no more than a sleepy and ordinary wicked old man. And this was the object and trade of that peculiar shop: you paid twenty francs, which the old man proceeded to take from me, for admission to the shop, and then had the right to ex-

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change any evil or misfortune of your own for some evil or misfortune that anyone on the premises "could afford," as the old man put it.

There were four men in the dingy ends of that low-ceilinged room who gesticulated and muttered softly in twos as men who make a bargain, and now and then more came in, and the eyes of the flabby owner of the shop leaped up at them as they entered, seemed to know their errands at once and each one's peculiar need, and fell back again into somnolence, receiving his twenty francs in an almost lifeless hand and biting the coin as though in pure absence of mind.

"Some of my clients," he told me. So amazing to me was the trade of this extraordinary shop that I engaged the old man in conversation, repulsive though he was, and from his garrulity I gathered these facts. He spoke in perfect English though his utterance was somewhat thick and heavy. He had been in business a great many years—how many he would not say—and was far older than he looked. All kinds of people did business in his shop. What they exchanged with each other he did not care, except that it had to be evils; he was not empowered to carry on any other kind of business.

There was no evil, he told me, that was not negotiable there; no evil the old man knew had ever been taken away in despair from his shop. A man might have to wait and come back again next day and next and the day after, paying twenty francs each time, but the old man had the addresses of his clients and shrewdly knew their needs, and soon the right two met and eagerly changed their commodities. "Commodities" was the old man's terrible word, said with a gruesome smack of his heavy lips, for he took a pride in his business, and evils to him were goods.

I learned from him in ten minutes very much of human nature, more than I had ever learned from any other man; I learned from him that a man's own evil is to him the worst thing that there is or could be, and that an evil so unbalances all men's minds that they always seek for extremes in that small grim shop. A woman who had no children had exchanged with an impoverished half-maddened creature with twelve. On one occasion a man had exchanged wisdom for folly.

"Why on earth did he do that?" I said.

"None of my business," the old man answered in his heavy, indolent way. He merely took his twenty francs from each and ratified the agreement in the little room at the back of the shop where his clients conducted their business. Apparently the man who had parted with wisdom had left the shop on the tips of his toes with a happy though foolish expression all over his face, but the other went thoughtfully away wearing a troubled look. Al-

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most always it seemed they did business in opposite evils.

But the thing that puzzled me most in all my talks with that unwieldy man, the thing that puzzles me still, is that none that had once done business in that shop ever returned again; a man might come day after day for many weeks, but once he did business he never returned; so much the old man told me, but, when I asked him why, he only muttered that he did not know.

It was to discover the wherefore of this strange thing, and for no other reason at all, that I determined myself to do business in the little room at the back of that mysterious shop. I determined to exchange some trivial evil for some evil equally slight, to seek for myself an advantage so very small as scarcely to give Fate as it were a grip; for I deeply distrusted these bargains, knowing well that man has never yet benefited by the marvelous, and that the more miraculous his advantage appears to be, the more securely and tightly do the gods or the witches catch him.

In a few days more I was going back to England and I was beginning to fear that I should be seasick: this fear of seasickness—not the actual malady but only the fear of it—I decided to exchange for a suitably little evil. I did not know with whom I should be dealing, who in reality was the head of the firm (one never does when shopping), but I decided that not even the Devil could make very much on so small a bargain as that.

I told the old man of my project, and he scoffed at the smallness of my commodity, trying to urge me on to some darker bargain; but he could not move me from my purpose. And then he told me, with a somewhat boastful air, tales of the big business, the great bargains, that had passed through his hands. A man had once run in there to try and exchange death; he had swallowed poison by accident and had only a few hours to live. That sinister old man had been able to oblige him. A client was willing to barter even that commodity.

"But what did he give in exchange for death?" I said.

"Life," said that grim old man with a furtive chuckle.

"It must have been a horrible life," I said.

"That was not my affair," the proprietor said, lazily rattling a little pocketful of twenty-franc pieces.

Strange business I watched in that shop for the next few days, the exchange of odd commodities, and heard strange mutterings in corners among couples who presently rose and went to the back room, the old man following to ratify.

Twice a day for a week I paid my twenty francs, watching life with its great needs and its little needs spread out before me in all its wonderful variety.

And one day I met a comfortable man with only a little need, he

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seemed to have the very evil I wanted. He always feared the elevator was going to break down. I knew too much of hydraulics to fear things as silly as that, but it was not my business to cure his ridiculous fear.

Few words were needed to convince him that mine was the very evil for him—he never crossed the sea, and I, on the other hand, could always walk upstairs—and I also felt at the time, as many must feel in that shop, that so absurd a fear could never trouble me.

When we both had signed the parchment in the spidery back room and the old man had ratified (for which we had to pay him fifty francs each), I went back to my hotel, and there I saw the deadly thing in the basement. They asked me if I would go upstairs in the elevator; from force of habit I risked it, and I held my breath all the way up and clenched my hands.

Nothing will induce me to try such a journey again. I would sooner go up to my room in a balloon. And why? Because if a balloon goes wrong you have a chance—it may spread out into a parachute after it has burst, it may catch in a tree, or a hundred and one things may happen; but if the elevator falls down its shaft, you are done. As for seasickness, I shall never be seasick again—I cannot tell you why except that I know that it is so.

And the shop in which I made this remarkable bargain, the shop to which none return when their business is done: I set out for it next day. Blindfold I could have found my way to the unfashionable quarter in which the mean street runs, where you take the alley at the end, whence runs the cul-de-sac where the queer shop stood. A shop with pillars, fluted and painted red, stands on one side; its other neighbor is a low-class jeweler's with little silver brooches in the window. In such incongruous company stood the shop with the three brown beams of wood and all the rest of it painted green.

In half an hour I stood in the cul-de-sac to which I had gone twice a day for the last week. I found the shop with the ugly painted pillars and the jeweler who sold brooches; but the green house with the three brown beams was gone.

Pulled down, you will say, although in a single night? That can never be the answer to the mystery, for the shop of the fluted pillars painted red, and the low-class jeweler's shop with its silver brooches (all of which I could identify one by one) were standing side by side.

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Addie Leister was plain-looking—in fact, she looked more like a man than a woman. But she was independent and self-sufficient—and she had her feminine dreams . . . and she had a trick of talking to herself, of unreeling a motion picture in her brain . . .

THE MOTION PICTURE IN MRS. LEISTER'S MIND

by FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

MRS. LEISTER DROVE HER scarred, dusty pickup into her driveway and got out ungracefully, easing her feet to the ground to avoid jarring her tired, dumpy body. Her grease-stained white coveralls testified to the hard work she had just been through, since Mrs. Leister made it a point of feminine honor to start each day in clean coveralls.

"I may work like a man, and look like a man, but I can't get over being a woman," she sometimes admitted, with bluff good humor, to the men who worked for her. "If I've got to run a gas station and change tires, I'll do a good job, with no ruffles dipping in the grease. But the ruffles have got to come out of me some way. Keeping clean is one of 'em."

She looked at the tall weeds growing in the flower beds beside the driveway, checked a groan as waste energy, and walked stolidly past the back door to the garage. There she took a small sickle off the wall, returned to the beds, and began hacking weeds. They spread out beside her, tall feathery wild oats, burr clover, and foxtails beginning to parch under the strong Southern California sun. The Bermuda grass she ignored as inevitable and incorrigible.

"Let it go too long," Mrs. Leister commented aloud, and then pursed her lips with self-disapproval. Talking aloud to herself was a bad habit that she was getting into lately—whether because she was now over forty or because she had lived alone too long, she wasn't sure. Either way, she didn't like it.

Either way, you're going to pot, Mrs. Leister said in her mind to Mrs. Leister. *So's this place—too much work, weeds eating it up; you just let 'em go, Matt, just let 'em crawl over the windows—the old grease monkey can cut 'em; she was born for work not beauty.*

Mrs. Leister moved her head impatiently to shake her thoughts back into proper balance, and rigorously forced her attention on the strong, level sweep of her arm. Not until the job was finished did she ease

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upright, leaning back a little to stretch the kinks in her muscles, and gaze with both loathing and satisfaction at the pile of weeds lying about her.

"Poor Matt," she said aloud, as though to a second person. "He shouldn't have worked the little he did. Sick all those years before we knew it."

She looked across the driveway to the Jameson house next door and noticed that their light was already on in the kitchen. "I wonder how Sylvia is tonight," she muttered.

In the light she saw Milton Jameson walking back and forth. He stopped about where the stove would be, seemed to be thinking, ran his hand through his pale hair, then walked to the sink.

"Poor soul, I know what he's up against," Mrs. Leister said aloud, before she could stop herself. *Shut up, you old windbag*, she added in silent sternness, *you got something to say but nobody to say it to, so keep it to yourself.*

An impulse came to Mrs. Leister, and with efficient directness she veered from the garage without waiting to put up the sickle, and went through a break in the prickly lantana hedge ——— *said the blame thing would grow fast, wouldn't need to build a fence; Matt wouldn't even stir himself to build us a proper fence, now I've got to prune it every week* ——— that Matt had planted between sick spells to separate the two properties. She went up the Jameson's back steps and knocked on the door.

She had to knock again before Milton opened the door. Then he stood back, tense and uneasy, the light behind him casting shadows into the lines on his face. "Oh, Addie, good evening. I—I had something on the stove to take care of, didn't know it was you."

"I know how it is," Mrs. Leister said comfortably. "Come home from a day's hard work, gets a person all fussed just boiling water." She hesitated, thinking he looked older than she did for all he must be ten years younger; no blood to the man. "How's Sylvia tonight? I looked in at noon and I thought her lips were a little blue."

The shadows on his face contorted briefly. "Not well," he said. "Not well at all."

"Tell you what, Milton," Mrs. Leister said, pushing back her yearning to take a hot bath and get herself into a soft, easy housecoat. "I'll go wash up and get rid of this—" and she lifted the sickle to show what she meant.

Milton Jameson let out a reflexive cry and drew back against the kitchen table.

Mrs. Leister laughed ruefully. "Matt always said I moved like a pile driver—guess it looked like I was coming at you. I've been cutting weeds. Anyway, I'll take a quick wash, then come back and get your dinner going while you look after Sylvia."

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"Oh, no, Addie, not after the way you work all day," he protested. "I'll get along all right. Neither of us feels much like eating tonight."

"Then this is the time for me to cook something real nice," Mrs. Leister said. "I'm only too glad to do it—it helps pay back all the nice things folks did for me when Matt was sick. I'll be right back."

"And good I thought of it, too, poor man—he looks worn out," she said aloud as she entered her own bathroom a few minutes later. She looked longingly at the bathtub, brusquely pushed aside the desire again, and scrubbed her nails with the handbrush. "Running a gas station sure fixes your hands," adding matter-of-factly, "but it pays good, and at least I'm my own boss."

Actually, for the most part, Mrs. Leister was rather pleased with herself. At thirty-five she had found herself with a sick husband and a sick gas station which Matt never seemed to get cleaned up; tires never fixed on schedule, and customers' cars were serviced with gas only after their horns were tired of honking. For a year or two, Matt had been well enough to get around. In that time she had followed him about, handing him tools, waiting on trade, asking questions, adding soda pop and candy and car accessories to the stock, paying to have a city map printed with her ad on its back, thinking up extras like that big sign ——— *it didn't take brawn to lift a paint brush, Matt —even a sick man could pick up a board and a can of paint and a brush, and with a little spunk you'd have had the sign you needed five years ago; you act like cars carry bloodhounds to track down gas stations. I may not be pretty like those girls you're always watching cross the street against the sun but I've got more brains in my little finger*

"Addie Leister, you never said any such thing to poor Matt!" she chided aloud. "You put him to bed where he should have been months before, and you painted that sign yourself."

Even after Matt had to be in bed all the time, needing so much care, she managed somehow to keep the business going—hiring part-time help, making Matt feel part of it by asking him questions, keeping a shut-mouth on her innovations. Everybody admired her, and Mrs. Leister admired herself, and business picked up. Now, with Matt gone two years, business was better than ever. But the memory of those past hard times gave her a realistic sympathy for Milton Jameson.

"A librarian's got a nice sound," she murmured chattily, "but salaries paid by the city don't amount to much. He'd be better off selling gas for me—I might sound him out about it some day. And with all those knickknacks and medicines he has to buy for Sylvia. That was another new bed-jacket she had on this noon—I swear she dresses up

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in that bed like it was a stage. Lying around, keeping her hands nice, fixing up—no wonder she's . . ."

pretty-pretty-pretty, Mrs. Leister's secret mind went, chirping to itself like little girls in a game, *pretty-pretty little girls, only not you, you big fat slob jouncing like a feather bed; played all the baseball you wanted with the boys but what about the parties; remember that lodge dance and you the seventh girl Matt asked; he got turned down six times because he was going towards forty—but not the seventh time, huh, Addie, and you only twenty; Addie, you sure been a good*

"Pretty," she said, finishing her spoken sentence, the sound prodding down the roiling thoughts as a brisk spoon-stirs down a boiling kettle. "Pretty," she said again, righteously, remembering the ethereal effect of Sylvia Jameson's new pale green bed-jacket against that pale cameo face.

Mrs. Leister shrugged, dried her hands, and went to her closet to get a large apron to cover her soiled white coveralls. As the closet door opened, her eyes watered with involuntary pleasure. Not for the two sensibly dark suits, or the small figured print dress. But for the big flowered housecoats, the flowing negligees, the beautifully pressed silk and lace nightgowns hanging on hangers to avoid creases, and the bright satin slippers on the shoe rack.

"Pretty, pretty," she said, refreshed, feeling soothed and exquisite as she always did when she saw those lovely things that belonged to her—to her body.

She wished fleetingly that she had time to bathe and put on one of the housecoats—not the newest, not anything that would seem too forward, although that was nonsense with Milton Jameson already married and so much younger———

he looks as old as you—he's no prize; Matt, I'd give a lot to see your face if you could see me in one of these negligees; clothes do a lot, Matt; the way you'd look at me when I came home in those coveralls after working like a horse—I don't like that kind of look, Matt, and I don't like the way Sylvia Jameson looks at me laughing inside but with her mouth straight

She remembered when the Jamesons had moved next door. Right after Matt had died—maybe that was why Sylvia always upset her so much, her sick all the time and Matt gone so recently. Milton had carried Sylvia up the walk and into the house. And over his shoulder Sylvia had given Mrs. Leister one of those unsteadying looks, her small black brows peaked and quizzical above those delicately carved, pale features. Afterward, when Mrs. Leister went over to welcome them and offer help, Sylvia sat up in bed like an actress playing a part, backdropped by little colored pillows, her arms looking filmy and pearly through a sheer violet bed-jacket.

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"She's been ailing for a long time," Milton once told his neighbor. "She craves pretty things to make up for it. And lots of color."

There wasn't much color about Milton Jameson, and Mrs. Leister had caught herself wondering if Sylvia craved him—or was he part of what the color was making up for—and did he know it—and was that why he was always bringing home boxes of new robes and nightdresses for Sylvia to choose from. "I'm as strong as a horse and look like one too," Mrs. Leister had told him, laughing heartily. "But I like pretty things too."

It was soon after this Mrs. Leister bought her own first gossamer robe. The first night she put it on, she pulled down the blinds all through the house. Then she walked back and forth across her living room with the radio tuned to a dance orchestra, practicing to get the coverall stride out of her legs.

On this same night Mrs. Leister stopped eating dinner at the kitchen sink and carefully set the dining-room table. A few nights later she brought home a pair of silver candlesticks. After she had lighted the candles and seen the soft sheen they gave to her filmy turquoise robe, she raised the blinds. Sylvia Jameson's bedroom was directly across.

Sometimes, as time went by, Sylvia would lean forward in her bed and wave, very sweetly. Sylvia was a very sweet little lady—like honey in a vinegar bottle, with a little of the vinegar still clinging to the sides . . .

The big apron concealing the grease spots on her coveralls, Mrs. Leister went back through her kitchen, picking up her cake box on the way, and hurried across the drive to the Jameson kitchen. Milton was fooling around the sink, opening a can of soup, looking distraught and ineffectual.

"Shall I run in and say hello to Sylvia, or doesn't she feel like it?" Mrs. Leister asked.

He dropped the can of soup in the sink, and hastily retrieved it. "She isn't well," he said. "She isn't a bit well."

"Maybe you ought to call the doctor."

"I think she's falling asleep. That is—she may be asleep already. I'll ask her when she wakes up. Sometimes it upsets her—I mean if I just go ahead and call the doctor, she sometimes gets upset."

"Now let me see," Mrs. Leister said, giving the kitchen a brisk look. "What have you got started?"

She saw, then, that nothing was started, except for the soup Milton had just opened, in spite of him saying he had something on the stove. She began opening cupboards, searching out potatoes and pans. There were frozen vegetables and three lamb chops in the refrigerator. She busied herself at the sink and stove, vaguely realizing that Milton had left the kitchen and was moving around in the bedroom next to it.

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She found a tray and set it up nicely, with a bright geranium from the back yard beside the plate. Milton came in. "Dozing off," he said. "She doesn't want the doctor."

"Foolishness," said Mrs. Leister. "That's Matt all over again. Thought he was saving trouble but only making more in the long run. Well, I'll just go along home then. Everything's fixed and I guess three chops won't hurt you—you look peaked."

"I am tired," he admitted. He ran his hand through his thin, light hair, wandered over to the sink, then back to the table. "Addie, please stay and eat dinner with me," he begged. "I don't want to eat alone. Not tonight. It's past time for your dinner and there's plenty for the two of us. Please, Addie."

Even though she knew the invitation was prompted only by his loneliness, its intensity flattered her. A heavy, stinging flush began in front of her ears and spread slowly over her face. She ducked her head, pretending to smooth the apron over her coveralls.

"Dressed like this? Honest, Milton, I wouldn't feel comfortable if I weren't cleaned up. It's bad enough that I look like this all day, but at night—" With an effort, a good-humored laugh came out of her at her own discomfiture. "Just can't get away from being a woman. I always dress for dinner—it makes me feel better."

"I've seen you!" His voice was shockingly on the border of hysteria. "Addie, for heaven's sake, those long flopping ribbony things—that's not you! I want you to stop it. You look better in coveralls—you really do!"

Mrs. Leister's mouth stayed open on her laugh, her face muscles frozen with amazement and hurt. He stared back in equal amazement.

"I admit I haven't the figure for it," she said stiffly.

"Addie, I don't mean it that way."

She didn't say anything. Rage at him, and at Matt, and at all the males of her life—even her father who had always called her his "boy"—had her in the pit of the stomach.

"Not that way, Addie. I mean, in coveralls you're beautiful—really beautiful. Strong and—well, clean, even when there's grease on them—clean like rivers and trees and clouds. You look so strong and natural—I mean, natural the way people ought to be. I'm upset, Addie, I'm not thinking how it might sound. Don't take it wrong. Please stay."

The rage lost its hold and slipped, slipped, out of her pores, leaving her hands unsteady, making way for a kind of timid delight. She didn't trust herself to speak, but smiled stiffly and nodded, unconsciously still smoothing the big apron. She took the geranium off the tray, put it in a glass, and set it on the table. They sat down.

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It was not nearly so nice as in her own dining room with her own pretty silver candlesticks. But it was good to have someone across the table—will you have some potatoes—I put a little onion in the salad—I think it picks it up—and it would have been very cozy if Milton had not acted so nervous, looking at her, looking down, looking up, his hands jerking.

Then, for an instant, Mrs. Leister was afraid one of those crazy thoughts she was always getting lately had spoken itself out loud. "I love you." Did she say it?—or did Milton say it?

"I love you, Addie," Milton said. And she clearly saw his lips move. "God knows, I didn't mean to say it. But I've been thinking it for weeks—I can't get it off my mind. Addie, maybe if I say it, it'll straighten things out. And I hate to watch you try to change into something you're not—into something weak, coddled, unwholesome! Addie, when you put those things on at night, it's like putting scum on a crystal pool, moss on an oak."

"You're as sick as your wife," Mrs. Leister heard herself say from a great distance. "Hush this minute and take a drink of coffee."

This show of authority seemed to relieve Milton. Like a dutiful child, he picked up his cup and held it to his lips. Then he set it down and began to cry.

By the Lord Harry, if that's what you want, look your fill, she said to Milton in the motion picture that was beginning to run through her mind. And in the motion picture *she flung off the apron, displaying the greasy front of her coveralls.*

That's my girl, that's my beauty, a regular old chunk of earth, said Milton to Addie in the moving picture.

You ought to get a look at me after I change a tire, said Addie to Milton, very roughly. *Now listen, I'm sick of that old guff, you hear, that's just a come-on to get more work out of me.*

You'll be sicker when you know what I've done for you, said the motion-picture Milton; *I've just killed my wife, I've just killed my wife, I've just killed*

With an effort, Mrs. Leister pulled mental shutters across this secret drama, letting no evidence of it touch the surface of her face. She sat quietly, letting him cry it out, remembering something she had once read—that tears held back will poison the system. *I'm poisoned all right, I'm good and poisoned.*

When Milton eased up his sobbing, she said sternly, "That was an awful thing to say. You surely didn't mention it to Sylvia."

He shook his head. "She wouldn't have believed me if I had," he said. "She thought you were funny, the way she used to laugh when you dressed up at night, eating alone with the candles lighted. She'd wave through the window at you, then lean back on the pillows and laugh. She said it was a sight, the

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way you were trying to impress me, that you had your eye on a prospective widower. Actually, that was what started me thinking about—well, about us, Addie. Then I told Sylvia she had to stop laughing at you, I couldn't stand it."

Something in what he was saying tied in with the mood of Mrs. Leister's thoughts. Something elusive. Then she knew. *Used to laugh*, Milton had said.

She didn't waste time asking any questions, or getting any answers. She strode out of the kitchen and into Sylvia's bedroom.

A dim night lamp lighted Sylvia Jameson's still, slender form. One arm had slipped over the side of the bed and the fingers dangled just above the floor.

Mrs. Leister swallowed heavily, but she did not scream. She walked quickly, realistically, to the bed and saw what premonition had told her she would see—dark red spots spilled along the side of the bed, staining the sheets, down to the gray rug.

For such violence, Sylvia Jameson looked strangely tranquil, her lips slightly parted. Mrs. Leister reached for the covers. But then her businesslike sense took over. Things must be left as they were. For the police.

She heard Milton move behind her, hurriedly, yet softly, and she faced him. "You crazy man! Have you lost your mind?"

"Don't! Not in here!"

"It won't hurt her, the way she is," she said. "What happened?"

"Not in here, please!"

"What happened?"

He looked timidly at his wife's form, then came close to Mrs. Leister and spoke softly. "Tonight I—well, I couldn't stand any more. She watched you get out of the truck and she said—well, it doesn't matter what she said, it was cruel and superior. She didn't laugh—I'd warned her about that, we had quite a quarrel about that. But what she said was as bad as laughing—worse. And I thought of how the doctor said she could get better if she really wanted to, and then how different you were, so . . ."

Mrs. Leister turned away from him abruptly and leaned once more over Sylvia. There were faint finger welts on the pale cheek. Yes, it was clear. They'd quarreled. He'd struck her, and then . . .

Sylvia's other hand, lying spread on the far side of the bed, caught her attention. Dark red marks were on that hand, too. Even and shiny, on three long, smoothly filed fingernails. The other two fingernails were pale and dull, still unpolished.

Mrs. Leister looked again at the marks on the sheet and rug. Her gaze followed a suggested, but invisible, trail to the bedside table where a small bottle stood on a piece of tissue, red polish strewling down its side. In the confusion of harsh words and angry gestures the bottle must have toppled, spilled, been picked up, and put on the table.

Then—

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Sylvia Jameson stirred, opened eyes which had the opaque and preoccupied expression of a person under sedation, shut them, and sighed.

Milton Jameson sighed too. "Still asleep," he said, relieved. "She took a couple of sleeping tablets. I—I don't think we should talk in here."

Don't try to trick me, Mrs. Leister heard Addie Leister say as the motion picture in her mind once more began to flash its scenes; *the woman's dead, you killed her, you killed her for me.*

I just wanted to see how you'd take to the idea, said Milton, flickering in and out of focus, first laughing and then crying; what made the man cry all the time

Milton Jameson was crying again, soundlessly, as though he didn't trust the sleeping tablets, and his weakness sent shivers of distaste through Mrs. Leister. She longed to be out of the house—it was like a disease, aggravating these insane thoughts which cobwebbed the unused corners of the sane mind. She was afraid she heard herself say, "I'm a sane woman!" But perhaps she only thought it.

"Take a couple of those sleeping tablets yourself and get in bed," she ordered coldly. "And never mention any of this again. Never. If your wife wants to laugh, it's her own business."

She stumped back to the kitchen, left a piece of cake on a plate, gathered up the cake holder, and went home. There she entered her bathroom, started warm water running in the tub, and hurried to undress. ———*you old fool, you old fool, you old old fool*———"Shut up!" she said aloud.

She eased into the tub and let the water crawl over her shoulders, let her arms languidly float, trying to relax. But it was difficult, difficult . . . *with Matt standing right before her in the bathroom, all dressed up and smooth-faced the way he had been in his coffin.*

You sure been a good old grease monkey, Addie, he said; I told you all along there's more to a woman than looks. I fell in love with your coveralls too

She sat up straight in the bathtub and screamed, "You shut up, Matt! I told you never to say that again!" Then she shivered, took her eyes away from the figure that wasn't there, and pulled her shoulders back under the water.

But she couldn't keep Matt away —he wouldn't stay decently buried in the past.

He was saying, Those coveralls added up good on the cash register, Addie; I said it the day we got married and I'll say it again—there's more to a woman than looks

Matt, you said it your last time—that's why I put the pillow on your face; but I didn't think you'd stop breathing so fast, I didn't know you were that far gone, Matt. I only wanted to stuff those words down your throat

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Once upon a time (in September 1962, to be exact) Theodore Sturgeon had occasion to look through his old files for the carbon copy of an early short story—and lo and behold, out popped another short story, one that had never been published and which Mr. Sturgeon had completely forgotten about. This original manuscript was resting in peace under (to quote Mr. Sturgeon) "some layers of peat moss in the bottom of an old box . . ." Now, Mr. Sturgeon could not remember how long ago he had written this newly discovered story—he judged he "had done it for some demanding editor back in the 16th or 17th century . . ."

Well, the interesting thing about this previously unpublished Sturgeon is simply this: it is a genuine "period piece"—a story that will remind you of "the good old days" of Street & Smith's "Detective Story Magazine"—the "dear, dead days" of Herman Landon's The Gray Phantom and of Johnston ("Mark of Zorro") McCulley's Thubway Tham . . . ah, remember? This new-old Sturgeon is the kind of story that was sedately popular in the 1920s, the accepted detective fare of its time (when the hard-boiled experiment was just beginning). It is the kind of story that, we judge, could have been written early in the same decade that saw the birth of Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey, Earl Derr Biggers' Charlie Chan, S. S. Van Dine's Philo Vance—and E.Q.'s Ellery Queen . . .

HOLDUP À LA CARTE

by THEODORE STURGEON

GLADYS MCGONIGLE, WHO WAS known as Happy, was not. She stood behind the counter of Hart Calway's restaurant, and cried. In her hand was the bakelite grip of a glass coffee-maker. At her feet were the glittering shards of what had been, until a moment ago, a twelve-cup lower bowl.

"It's his fault and I *hate* him," she said untruthfully. Of course, it was only remotely Hart's fault that she had broken the coffee-maker, and burned sixteen slices of toast that morning, and told the milkman not to bring buttermilk when she *knew* buttermilk biscuits were on the menu. It was Hart's fault because when he was not there her mind was full of Hart's wide shoulders and Hart's crisp blond hair and Hart's smile . . . Sometimes the smile made a small, sweet chucking noise, when it was sudden enough.

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She began to smile at the thought, and the cry-puckers over her winged nostrils smoothed out and let the bright tears run. She set the bakelite handle down in the center of a bowl of mayonnaise and dabbed at her cheeks with a paper napkin. "I do try," she sniffed.

It wasn't the job. A girl as pretty as Happy could get plenty of jobs. A girl who was as good a waitress as Happy usually was, could get jobs easily too. "I'm just no good *here*," she sobbed.

"I hate him," she repeated, and then uttered a woeful moan as she saw the mayonnaise bowl. "He hates me too. He *makes* me do things like this." She picked out the bakelite handle, shook the surplus mayonnaise from it, and dropped it into the garbage bin. "Leaving me alone with robbers and murderers," she muttered.

She was thinking of the reason for Hart's absence—a meeting of the Clay Street Merchant's Association to discuss emergency measures for dealing with a particularly slick crook who was apparently determined to hold up every member of the Association, in turn. "It won't be a long meeting," he had said. "Hold the fort, will you, Hap? You don't have to serve anything but short orders, and there'll be enough customers in to make it safe."

Well, he was wrong there. There hadn't been a soul in the place except herself and one fly since he left. "But Hap—keep your eyes peeled all the same. The whole week's receipts are in the cash drawer. I'd take 'em to the night depository before the meeting only I'm late already. I'll do it as soon as I get back—got to run, the boys are waiting."

The boys, Hap thought bitterly as she mopped the counter. He'll entertain the boys with tales of the big one that got away, and how hard the tarpon struck his line that day. Fishing and working—that's all he ever thinks about! She could take fishing or she could leave it alone; but to be fair about it, she had to admit that the way he worked was one of the things she loved about him—that, and his eyes, of course. And the way he—

She smiled again as she thought of his intense face the day after he had hired her. "You're going to think I'm crazy, Miss McGonigle. And tough, too, maybe. But this place is all I have in the world. Every penny I could save by working for other people is in those fixtures and that equipment. It's only a little short-order place, but a lot of big things have started small. And this is going to be as big as I can make it. Work and economize, work and economize—that's all I can have around here."

And she had looked up at him and said, "You call me Hap, then. It's more economical"—and he had given her the smile, the wide sudden

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one, and had touched her shoulder.

"You'll do."

She touched the shoulder now. She hadn't "done." She had tried so hard to help, and had fallen all over herself, and everything had gone wrong.

She went to the end of the counter and slid open the old-fashioned cash drawer. There was no register—just a sturdy wooden drawer with partitions in front for change and a deep recess in the back for the heavy canvas sack the bank issued for night deposits. She felt the strong fabric and the chunky packet of notes inside it, and they gave her a sudden chill.

He'd been so patient with her. She had done some of the stupidest, *stupidest* things, and never once had he bawled her out. Well, not really. With his eyes, and twice with a sort of resigned sigh that made her want to run away and hide her head. Suppose she was held up tonight? Suppose he came back and found the entire week's receipts gone, and the rent due, and the meat wholesaler not yet paid? What would he think of her then? What would he do?

He'd say quietly, "Hap, I'm sorry, but this is the last straw. This is too much. I'm afraid you'll have to go." That's what he'd say, and she'd just die, right there in front of him.

Imagine going to work somewhere else, and never seeing him again! Imagine maybe meeting him on the street and see his politest, coldest smile flick at her as he walked past, not wanting even to talk to her.

"Oh, *dear!*"

She stood for a moment with her hand on the canvas bag, quite overcome by her own imagination. And then she began to think—hard.

And then she did an extraordinary thing. She got a hammer and nails from the tool chest. She got a needle and thread from the dish-towel closet. And with the claw of the hammer she grimly pried off the hasp of Hart Galway's personal, private locker. . . .

A half hour later Happy was standing by the door looking out, hoping that she might get a glimpse of Hart striding toward her down the dark street. The man she saw reminded her of him. Tall men reminded her of him because he was tall, and short men reminded her of him because he was tall.

She shook her head sadly and looked at the man who was now approaching.

He was short, balding, and pudgy. He wore a jacket almost the color of the pumpkin pies she had spoiled last week, and not-quite-shabby brown trousers. He glanced up at her as he shambled past. A few feet farther on he stopped and peered through the restaurant window, right at the end where he could see down behind the counter. He seemed to be thinking something over. Then he turned and came back.

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"Got anything to eat?"

"Why, yes!" A customer, this late! Hart would be pleased. "Come in."

He followed her in and sat down at one of the tables. She put a menu in front of him—the one Hart had laughed at so, because she had typed "Hart and Eggs" on it.

"Lamb chops," said the pudgy man. "Peas and mashed. Apple pie and coffee."

"Lamb chops," she repeated, then "Lamb chops! But I—but the boss—" There are only two lamb chops left, you silly man, she thought, and Hart didn't have his dinner yet, and he'll want those lamb chops. He *likes* lamb chops! A oud she said, "Maybe a nice small steak . . ."

"It says here—" the man pointed "—it says lamb chops. You got lamb chops?"

"I—" The customer, Hart kept saying, is always right. "Yes, sir." She went dolefully back to the stove, and turned it on. Maybe, she thought as she greased the grill, maybe she could fix Hart something special. A potpie, perhaps. Then he would tell her that kind of food was for cash customers; he, Hart, was hired help the same as she was, even if he did own the place. But he did *so* like lamb chops . . .

She tonged a hot potato out of the steam table and pressed it through the ricer, mashed it deftly, and pulled it up to a cone with the tines of a fork. A pat of butter on top, the way Hart had shown her and a sprinkling of paprika to make it look luscious. Bright green peas around it in a ring, flanked by the sizzling chops. Pretty. Bread on a plate, a glass of water, and everything on a tray. Hart would have been proud of her. If, of course, she didn't tangle up her feet on the way and drop the tray in his lap.

She set the plate before the customer, saw to his salt and pepper and catsup, and then went behind the counter again. The man ate steadily and hungrily. She kept an eye on him, and when he had only a single forkfu left on his plate, she was there with the pie and coffee. That's the way to do it. That's how to run a restaurant. Let the boss go to his old cops-and-robbers merchant meetings. She'd run things like a clock.

She cleared off the dishes he had used, washed them immediately, and put them away. Then she made out the check, adding it three times to be sure it was right. She laid it properly, face down, at his left, and went away again.

He ate the pie as s'owly and deliberately as he had the rest of the meal, then reached for the check and patted his right hip pocket.

Then he patted his left hip pocket. Then his coat pockets.

"Miss," he called.

"Yes, sir?"

He coughed apologetically. "I—ah—seem to have left my wallet in my other clothes."

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"You—why, you—"

The oldest gag in the restaurant business, and it had to happen to her! Fury mounted in her. Burned toast and broken coffee-makers—and now this! A free meal—and Hart's lamb chops!

She searched futilely for a word, found an "Oh!", tried again, and said, "Why, I ought to have you arrested!"

"I beg your pardon," said the pudgy man. "Really, miss. It could happen to anyone. I don't know what to say. I could—I could leave you my name and address."

"I'm not interested in the address of an empty lot," she said coldly. "Haven't you any money at all?"

He shook his head, patting forlornly at his pockets.

Her eyes filled with tears—angry ones. "I don't know *what* my boss will say. I wish a policeman would walk in here right now, that's what I wish!"

And at that moment a policeman did walk in. The pudgy man half rose, opened his mouth, closed his mouth, and sat down again.

Happy whirled and stared. He was a big policeman, with hard eyes and a big face, and he had a big gun and a big nightstick. He said, "What's going on here?"

The pudgy man seemed to wilt. He sagged down in his chair, but he said nothing. Happy suddenly felt a twinge of pity. "This man didn't pay for his dinner," she said, in a considerably softer voice. "But it's all right. I can handle it, I—I think."

"A dead beat, eh?" said the policeman. He looked around the restaurant, out into the deserted street, and licked his lips. "I got just the treatment for dead beats." He swung his nightstick by its leather thong, caught the handle deftly, and advanced on the pudgy man.

"No!" cried Happy. "Don't hit him, officer! It's—it's all right. I'll take care of the bill myself." The look of fear on the pudgy man's face as he started out of his chair had simply torn her apart. Why, he was little, and hungry, that was all!

"You keep out of this now, kiddo," said the policeman. He brought his stick point downward on the checked tablecloth with a crash. "Out of my way—I'll fix him!"

Happy pushed between him and the table. "No! No!"

The policeman swept her aside with one easy motion, leaned over, and tapped the pudgy man behind the ear with the stick. The dead beat sighed and slid under the table.

"See how easy?" said the policeman.

"You *pushed* me!" gasped Happy. "And you hit that poor little man, why you great big—" and she ran out of words. Then her temper burst through, and she rushed at him, forgetting his gun, his stick, his size, his uniform, everything. He was nothing but a cruel bully, and

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she felt just as she had when she was a child and saw a man beating a dog.

Her attack was so sudden that even though her figure was small and her pert face soft, Happy could pack a surprising wallop. She hit the policeman's blue-clad chest as if she had been fired from a cannon, like the girl in the circus. The policeman staggered back, tripped over the pudgy man's leg, which stuck out from under the table, and went down like tall timber.

For a blind moment the smoke of fury curled around Hap's brain and she saw nothing—only a blur. Then her vision cleared.

Two broken chairs. A table and some dishes in a rubble on the floor. The still figure of the pudgy man. And the policeman, groaning, feebly feeling the side of his head where it had struck the counter. He rolled over and began to drag one knee under him.

Happy uttered a mouse-like squeak and fled.

This was the end. This was the complete, utter, final finish of everything.

She ran, sobbing, down the street, not caring where she was going. She had attacked a policeman, wrecked the restaurant, maybe cost Hart Calway everything he had worked so hard to accumulate. And now Hart would never want to see her again.

She ran right into his arms.

"Oh, oh dear!" she gasped. "Policeman. Oh, Hart! The little man couldn't pay lamb chops hit him on the head!"

"What?"

There were two men with Hart. One of them said, "Sounds like someone got hit on the head with some lamb chops."

"Shut up, Frank. There's something wrong here. Bill, blow your whistle."

A shrill blast ripped out. For some reason it loosed a flood of tears in Happy.

Hart put an arm around her shoulders. "Come on, Happy darling," he said gently. "Let's go back and straighten it all out."

Happy looked up into his face. She had caught one word, and fixed on it. She said it. "Darling."

"Why—Happy!"

"Come on!" said the man called Bill.

Somehow Happy got her feet under her and found another breath or two. They ran back down the street. At the corner near the restaurant they were joined by two policemen.

"Who blew that whistle?"

"Come on!" Hart said urgently.

They skidded to a stop in front of the restaurant. One of the policemen barked, "Down! Get *down!*"

The next thing Happy knew she was sitting on the pavement in front of the restaurant, dragged down by Hart. "Sorry, darling, but that man inside's got a gun."

Slowly she raised her head. She could just see into the restaurant.

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The big policeman who had hit the dead beat was behind the counter with his hand in the cash drawer. He was staring at the pudgy man, who was walking toward him on the balls of his feet. Suddenly the little man ran two delicate steps and leaped over the counter.

The policeman tried to reach his gun, but before he could grasp it, the little man was on him like a dervish. There was a flurry of action and the little man backed off, the gun in his hand.

The two policemen, the three merchants, and Happy crowded into the restaurant. One of the policemen said, "Why—it's the Chief!"

The pudgy man straightened up. "Hello, boys," he panted. "Get the handcuffs on him. We'll book him for everything from armed robbery to impersonating an officer. Know him?"

Hart looked at the limp blue figure behind the counter. "I know him," he said.

"Me too," said the man called Frank. "That's Eddie Lowell. He was bootlegging from the back room of a drug store, and the Merchant's Association ran him out. No wonder he's been working us over, one by one."

Happy's head was whirling. "Please," she said faintly. "Will s-somebody tell me what—I mean—are *you* the Chief of Police?"

The pudgy man smiled and nodded. "You, young lady, are worth your weight in gold. I mean it. This fellow has a record as long as my arm, and rewards to go with it."

"Chief," said Hart in a bewildered voice, "will you please start from the beginning and tell me just what's been going on here?"

"Why, sure, son." The Chief leaned back against an undamaged table. "The way I got into it—well, I must confess that you Association men shamed me into it. If merchants have to get together for protection against a holdup man, instead of relying on the police, why, it's a sad business. I put on these old clothes and mooched around trying to think like a criminal. I spotted this place as a natural for a holdup. Only a girl to watch it—but what a girl! Know what she did? She booby-trapped the cash drawer, and on top of that, she knocked Lowell down and ran for the police."

"Knocked—" Hart looked at her with amazement. "And what do you mean, booby-trapped the cash drawer?"

Happy gulped. "I was scared about the cash. So I b-broke into your locker, Hart, and got all your fishhooks and sewed them into the cash bag with their points downward. And I nailed the bag to the bottom of the drawer, so if anyone tried to get it out, they couldn't, and they'd have to reach into it for the money and—*oh!*"

"What's the matter?" asked the Chief.

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Happy said, "You really did leave your wallet in your other clothes, didn't you?"

The Chief's eyes twinkled. "I really did. I never want you for an enemy, young lady. You had sparks flying out of you! Anyway, this crook Lowell didn't recognize me. He was probably going to pretend to guard me while he sent the girl for the police. Then he'd take the money and run, and the poor old dead beat—me!—would be in for it. Of course, I knew he wasn't one of my boys the minute I laid eyes on him, so I decided to sit tight and try to catch him in the act. You beat me to it, young lady," he finished, wagging his head admiringly.

After they had all gone, after Hart had laughingly waved off the Chief's insistence that he owed him for a meal, Happy turned to right the overturned table. Hart caught her arm. "Hap—"

She waited.

"Hap, I—" She had never heard him stumble over his words before. "Hap, what do you suppose a fellow works for—works hard and saves and tries to build something up?"

"To get ahead."

"Yes, but not only in business. Hap, I've worked twice as hard since I—you came here. Some day maybe I'll have enough—*be* enough to—to—" He stopped, turned her to face him. "Would you wait until then?"

She lowered her voice. "If I had a part interest in this place I don't think I'd break things, Hart."

"You mean you—"

"—and with the reward money I get, you could buy a cash register and—and—because husbands and wives can jointly own—oh, *Hart!*"

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a new story by

HOLLY ROTH

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: HOLLY ROTH

TITLE: *The Loves in George's Life*

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A fascinating blow-by-blow account of what-had-gone-before (twice) and of what then happened between a wife murderer and wife Number Three . . .*

THERE WERE SEVERAL ODD things about the inquest.

The first was the exacting propriety with which it was conducted. This was due to the Coroner. As is often the case, the state's laws did not require that a Coroner have legal training. In the town of Clewton this leniency had been stretched to permit the appointment of a clergyman.

Public attention, as always fickle and flickering, had ignored the many other abuses abounding in town, settling indignantly on the rarely exercised sinecure of the Coroner's office. The incumbent political party, faced with an election, had hastily looked around for Someone Above Reproach. With admirable simplicity they had chosen a clergyman. But as it turned out, the town got a bonus with the choice: the Reverend Mr. Spring was not only honest, he was a legal buff. And so he conducted his quasi-court proceedings on a rigidly legal basis rarely seen at a small-town Coroner's inquiry.

However, although he was a good man, he *was* a man, and so not without vanity. His picture of himself reflected a broad knowledge of the world. He saw himself as mondain—as mondain, in fact, as all get-out. This picture was a trifle askew, and since Mr. Spring operated on a principle of judging others by himself, of not casting a first stone, and of doing unto others as he would

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appreciate being done unto, his rarely convened inquiries were examples of ultimate leniency. Doubt, in Mr. Spring's opinion, was the accomplice of despotism.

The second oddness about this particular inquest was a direct outgrowth of the first: the propriety and leniency that flowered in the large room behind the little jail barricaded the Chief of Police behind a wall of blossoming sweetness that was as impenetrable as would have been a barrage of stink bombs. Thwarted and baffled, he burned bright with frustrated rage. Throughout the inquiry a high official of the State-Attorney's office sat beside Clewton's Chief of Police, and nothing could have been clearer than their fiery desire for a rousing recommendation to a hanging.

This would-be persecution gained much sympathy for the already pathetically shorn spouse. The fact that the vindictiveness seemed inexplicable made it worse; the fact that it was not inexplicable made the officials doubly apoplectic.

None of which affected the Reverend Mr. Spring who, somewhat confusing a Coroner's inquest with Supreme Court proceedings, firmly permitted no reporting of rumor, or of past events that did not bear directly on the case at hand. No one was permitted to mention that his sad loss was an old tale, oft told to the bereaved; nor was anyone to discuss the circumstances of his previous bereavements.

A third oddness was that the insurance agent (a considerable amount of money was involved) testified in such a way as to guarantee that his company would pay.

The death was the result of murder; there could be no question about that. But a policy which benefited a murderer would not, in that state, have to be honored; and yet the insurance agent's testimony demolished the one possibility of there having been a premeditated motive for moving the deceased along the Outward Path. His testimony was not so surprising; he simply told the truth. But the fiction of the last half century has led to a picture of an insurance agent as a composite of sleuth, lawyer, and defender of his company beyond the call of duty.

Mr. Applebaum, the insurance agent, did not fit the picture: he and his brother, in their one-room upstairs office on Elm Street, wrote insurance, were public notaries, and sold real estate. When Mr. Applebaum was called on, he naturally told the truth—but the truth gained force by defying legend.

The verdict was, inescapably, "Murder"—but no individuals were named. "A person or persons unknown" left the police in the position of being called on to search the world, an action they were not likely to undertake in any circumstances, and certainly not when they were positive that the murderer

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was not only known but at fingertip distance.

Still, it may have been a good verdict. Forget the Reverend Mr. Spring, the state and local authorities, and Mr. Applebaum. Judge for yourself.

George Sommers was handsome in a vaguely stuffy way; he was also honest, sober, careful to a fault, industrious, well-meaning if not very bright, and a loving man. His idea of a happy life was to live with a woman—in a proper connubial arrangement, of course—earn a decent living ($6000 or $7000 a year would do), and eat steak on Sundays. He didn't like chicken, which may have been his only step toward chaos, out of the casement of the formulas that sheltered him.

He was 44 years old, and true love had finally come to him—about a year before. The lady he loved was his wife, of course, and this fact was difficult to understand—or it would have been to a stranger's eye, except that strangers' eyes rarely settled long on George.

George's wife was two years older, and she was unpretty, grasping, large, sardonic, sarcastic, awash with bitter humor and—most unforgivable of all—smarter than George.

But George forgave. George loved.

If anyone had bothered to examine the relationship, which nobody did, it would have been even more difficult to understand—because of that-which-had-gone-before.

When George was 43 and she was 45, he had married his third wife, Denise. But his first wife, Maureen, had been 20 to his 30, and his second wife, Rhoda, had been 19 to his 38.

Maureen, wife Number One, was a red-haired beauty, bewitching as Halloween, Irish as a bog, and—to most men—fully as much of a snare.

Rhoda, wife Number Two, was vaguely Eastern—with eyes as dark as the-lights-turned-out and a movement of her promising rear that was more magical than anything All Hallow's Eve has yet produced.

Denise, on the contrary, was foursquare, fore and aft, with small green eyes, dark hair, and no promise anywhere, except, if one didn't watch his step, the threat of being crushed.

But Denise had humor, even if it was a bit earthy and more than slightly sadistic; and George, who had none whatever, was in one way unusual—having no humor himself, he nevertheless treasured it. His first two wives, despite their beauty, had not been witty. He had missed the quality sorely. But now he had Denise, whose smallest, bitterest sally convulsed him. The fact that he was the butt mattered little. He treasured her.

George had two distinctions, other than his possession of Denise. One was a talent for being genuinely

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loved by ladies. (Denise happened to be an exception.) The other was that he was in the interesting position of being considered by the police of his state as a wife murderer. (This fact, which he enjoyed not at all, was the source of endless jokes by Denise.) He would have left the state, quickly and with relief, but he was a Chartered Public Accountant—chartered by his own state, of course.

"If a little thing like being recognized as a murderer bothers you," said Denise, watching him wash the dishes in their tidy little kitchen in their tidy little hilltop house, "couldn't we leave the state and live on your income?"

George chuckled, sobered, and said, "What income?"

"The insurance you garnered from the murders."

George chuckled again, then looked uneasily at the window. "Don't talk too loud, my dear," he said. He took up the dishtowel and added, "The income on the money, my love, comes to less than one thousand a year."

"Is that all! For two murders?"

George's eyes were still on the window; he forgot to laugh. "I was only thirty when I married Maureen, and so I couldn't afford a large amount of insurance. We took out policies on each other for five thousand apiece. She died, as you know, when our house burned down. When I married Rhoda, I was doing better, and I—ah—"

"Upped the ante. How much?"

"We took out mutual policies for ten thousand. She died of drowning."

"So we have only fifteen thousand! We *do* still have it?"

"Oh, yes! I wouldn't touch principal! But the result is that with only twenty-five thousand—the house burned to the ground and it was insured for ten thousand—our income is small. If we had fifty thousand or so, we could live anywhere, since I could make enough for a comfortable life even as an unchartered accountant—*if* we already had a sure two thousand a year. You see?"

"Um. And how much are *our* mutual policies? You did make me worth the killing, I presume?"

George roared with laughter, and closed the kitchen window. "No," he said. "No, I didn't. I went to see Charlie Applebaum—Bernie recommended him—and I took out a policy on my own life. With you the beneficiary of course. But as for the rest—well, I thought—"

Denise gave her rare cackle. "If you tried to insure me, they'd throw you out, huh? With *your* record!—George, the window is closed. Will you please stop worrying about it?"

"Yes, my love. But everyone can hear everything as they approach. Whether they want to or not. A darn peculiar arrangement."

"Why'd you buy the place?"

He stared at her in shock. "Why? Because when Bernie brought us up

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here to see it you loved it! You *said* you loved it. Because it's so cosy, and the little orchard—well, the plum, the apple, and the pear tree—are so nice. I bought it for you, my dear."

And that was true. George had been in Iona City (he moved after each wife's death), licking his wounds and avoiding ladies, when Denise had come up from Clewton, a neighboring and smaller town, to do some shopping.

George had met her and been enraptured, captured—except that Denise didn't seem to want her acquisition. This was new in George's experience and, fleetingly, an unworthy suspicion had crossed his mind: Denise was a divorcée, of fifteen years' standing; she lived on alimony, a small stipend that barely kept her going. If she married, she would lose the monthly payment on which she depended so much.

But it was an ungenerous thought; and when he told Denise his story, she seemed to grow more interested, and she made increasingly frequent trips, at George's expense, to Iona City.

Then, for a barren period, she stayed away.

But George's black desolation was lightened by a new acquaintance, a fellow named Bernie Kleber whom he met in the hotel lobby. Bernie, by coincidence, also hailed from Clewton, but in George's opinion he was by no means a small-town type. Slick fellow, in fact. He was tall, thin—narrow, really—with a narrow sleek head, a narrow sleek mustache, and a long narrow nose. He was very natty. He also had a deep, sonorous voice that would easily have fit a man twice his width; it was a salesman's voice and George thought admiringly that he could have sold anything to anyone.

And Bernie *was* a salesman, of various intangibles, but he never tried to sell anything to George. To George he was simply a pal, a good pal. He listened to George's story of unrequited love, sympathized, and counseled.

Oddly, considering Clewton's population of slightly under ten thousand, he didn't happen to know Denise.

Bernie finally completed his business in Iona City and went back to Clewton.

Shortly thereafter, Denise turned up looking, if not dewy-eyed, at least willing.

George telephoned to Clewton and Bernie came all the way back just to be the best man. A nice fellow. He then traveled back to Clewton with them. It was Denise's wish to settle there.

George took a small office on Ash Street, and soon found that local business, when added to the three big accounts (big from his point of view) that he had in Iona City and Tennston, would give him $6000 a

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year. Maybe even $6500. He took on a part-time secretary—Mrs. Binns, a widow of forty, who did part-time work in the two-block financial district, came in three times a week from nine to twelve, for $12 a week. Mrs. Binns was a small, twinkling woman, sweet, almost as humorless as George, every bit as earnest, motherly of bosom and instinct. She had tremendous interest in George and his business and probably saved him at least the $12 he paid her weekly.

With the tidy little house, isolated on its hilltop, so unselfishly sought out for them by Bernie; with Bernie's friendship and constant presence; with Mrs. Binns's motherly ministrations; with the neat and dependable little income; and most of all, with the possession of the cynical, sardonic, sarcastic, panickingly witty Denise—all was happy in the usually fluctuating world of George Sommers.

Bernie had even got him a small account. Then Bernie came up with a big one. . . .

"Spring is bludgeoning," Bernie boomed. He was a fancy and original talker, was Bernie. "Just look at the white flowers on that li'l ole pear tree! Well, any rate, the deal looks good and maybe you'll be bustin' out all over, too. You got a date on May second—that's Tuesday, George—bright and sharp like the first worm at nine ayem."

"Nothing as sharp as a worm," Denise commented acidly.

George laughed, and then sobered. "Nine. That means I'll have to drive most of the night."

"Whyn't you take the train? Only three and a half hours, about."

"I'm used to driving."

"Yeah. That's what Denise said you'd say when I got here before you this afternoon. She said you were a man of habit, and you'd insist on driving. But you want to be fresh in the morning, don't you? Like the first rose of spring, huh?"

"Bright like that worm," Denise said.

"Yes," George said seriously. "So I'll leave here after dinner. Eight o'clock. Six hours to Millville, so I can check into the Williams hotel at two a.m. and get six full hours' sleep."

"Um. That's what Denise said you'd do. But it's really only a four-hour drive, George—three, if you want to hurry a little."

"I drive at thirty miles an hour. Unless there's an emergency, I prefer to, Bernie."

"Yeah. That's what Denise said. Well, now, it's a wholesale hardware firm, like I told you, and a big one—"

"Sure. I know them. They're known all over the state."

"Yeah, but they're running down a little. Thing is, the son who inherited a couple years ago is a sucker. And like a lot of suckers, he's oversuspicious. Now he thinks something is wrong with the books. How I got on to it, while I was there—

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sold him a whopping amount of African gold certificates and he'll prob'ly make a fortune on them—he mentioned that he wasn't satisfied with his firm of accountants. That's how this all come up."

"Yes, you explained that."

"Three times," Denise said.

"Well, if I do any repeating it's because it's important for George to understand about this list. Young Arnold wants this list of every account you ever had, how long you had it, and who he can check for a reference at each firm. He doesn't want it verbal, either. All written out, neat and tidy. Between you and me, this kind of suspiciousness is the mark of a mark—take my word for it. Like with the gold stocks, he was gladder to buy them because I let him in on the secret that the young sheik is gonna take over the country and then the British'll move in. That will develop the properties, see? It's a good deal without that twist, of course, but he's the kind of a man who's got a crooked bone—thinks he'll do better if there's a crooked twist—and is sure everyone else is the same, trying to take him."

"It seems to me," Denise remarked dryly, "that you meet a lot of marks."

George said, "My dear! This is the first such man Bernie has ever mentioned! And you haven't known Bernie long enough to sound so—well, so critical. Besides, young Mr. Arnold has every right to ask for references, and I shall see to it that Mrs. Binns types them out without a single omission in the list."

On the evening of the first of May, just before supper, George packed a small bag and checked carefully through his brief case. He brought the two pieces of luggage into the kitchenette, along with his hat, and sat down to his evening meal in a business suit, complete with vest.

Supper was a brief affair. If the thought came to George that since he was setting out on a trip instead of retiring for the night, something more robust than usual might have been in order, he didn't mention it.

He finished his cup of chocolate and checked his watch. "It's five of eight," he said. "So, my dear . . ." He stood up.

"You're sure you have the list?" Denise asked.

"Certainly. I checked before I left the office, and I checked before dinner."

"And an extra towel?"

"What do I need an extra towel for?"

"Just in case."

"In case of what?" George asked in bewilderment. "The Williams is a good hotel."

"I think you ought to have one." Denise's mouth set firmly.

Well, it was nice of her to worry about him, and besides she could be very stubborn. George suppressed a sigh and went into the bathroom

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linen closet where he discovered that all the sheets had been piled on top of the hand towels. He kept the sigh at bay, resisted a glance at his watch, and moved the mountain of sheets.

He then returned to the kitchenette, where he found that Denise had very kindly opened his suitcase for him. He packed the towel, kissed her, picked up the two small pieces of luggage, and accepted the key case that she had thoughtfully closed in his own fashion—with the ignition key out, the others buttoned inside so that the keys would not mark up the dashboard.

Then George unbolted the kitchen door to the garage, listened until Denise had shot the bolt behind him, and got into the car just a trifle more quickly than usual. But it was only three minutes after eight—only three minutes behind schedule.

He stopped for gas at exactly ten o'clock. He got gas, distilled water for the battery, air for the tires, and everything else he could think of—he always believed in checking.

And because he always believed in checking, he had the garage attendant check the oil, and while that was going on he himself checked through his brief case. The painstaking list of his past twenty years of clients was not there. He must have laid it on the bed when he checked through his brief case just before dinner and then forgotten it. It wasn't like George to forget—not like him at all.

An emergency being an emergency, he drove home at a slightly faster clip than his usual thirty, but he stayed well within the 60 miles an hour that the parkway allowed, to say nothing of the 75 his car was easily capable of.

He stopped the car on the little-used road where the small hill that was their front garden overhung. He was reaching for the keys when he became aware of light. He climbed over the garden and then could see that the light, filtering through the plum, the apple, and the pear tree, came from the kitchen. But—he checked his watch—it was after eleven o'clock on a balmy spring evening. He and Denise usually retired by ten.

He walked up the path that wound past the kitchen to the front and only door, and saw as he approached that the kitchen window was open. In view of the weather that was not too surprising, but that Denise was not alone, that *was* rather surprising.

"—off the light," said a deep voice.

"What for?" Denise asked.

"Because I say so," Bernie replied.

Amazingly, the light went out. Denise was not usually inclined to obey males for the minor if incontrovertible reason that they were males. "It's nonsense," she said sulkily. "Who comes visiting this

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so-called honeymoon cottage at night?"

"Don't belittle the cottage. It made us a nice commission, and we'll do well on the resale. As for the light—better safe than sorry. Now, you're sure he'll take the one o'clock train?"

"How many times do you have to be reassured? He'll arrive at the Clewton station at four twenty-eight this morning. He'll be here in less than twenty minutes, and he'll already be planning to catch the five twenty out. That would put him at the Arnold Company's door at just nine."

"But suppose he goes to his office for the carbon of the list?"

"He knows the original list was here before dinner. He'll think he must have laid it on the bed when he was checking—checking, checking, checking—before dinner. He'll want the neat original, not a smudgy carbon copy."

"But will he discover tonight that he hasn't got it? That's what bugs me."

"My God, Bernie, how many times do I have to tell you? He'll check into the Williams Hotel, go to his room, unpack his pajamas, wash his hands, open the brief case, and—whoops, home he'll come."

"All right, Now, you know just what you do?"

"Again? Must I go through it again? I shoot him. How simple can one get? I shoot him, and I don't like it."

"Now, Denise, why?"

"Because I'll have to stand trial, that's why."

"But you *won't*. A woman defending her honor—"

Denise used a very strong word of derision. "Honor," she added. "Everybody in Clewton, with the single exception of George, considers that you took care of my honor some thirteen years ago."

"We'll leave here." Bernie's deep voice was hypnotically soothing. "We'll leave here, get married, and live on fifty thousand bucks."

Denise didn't sound hypnotized. "On the *income* from fifty thousand bucks. Which isn't, George advises me, a hell of a lot of money. You'll have to eke out the difference."

"When I invest it, my darling, you'll be surprised at how much—"

"Brace yourself, Bernie—you're not going to invest it. *I* am—in a savings bank. It's going to stay in my name, and you're going to provide the difference. My only investment is going to be a safe one—an airtight will leaving my all to a foundation for airedales. So we won't have any more per year than the alimony you've been helping me live on for thirteen years. In other words, the scheme is just as stupid as most of your others."

"The difference"—Bernie sounded agonized—"is that it *is* a lump sum. I can—we can—increase it. Don't you *see*?"

"All I see is that I have to stand trial, and I don't like it."

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"But you *won't*. A man comes in your window; you shoot him. What else is a defenseless woman supposed to do? And the bonus—"

"In this town I'm considered about as defenseless as a cobra. This reputation has been earned with your help."

"—and the bonus is that he comes in the window. You *see*?"

"No. Everyone will be able to figure out that he came in the window because he didn't have a doorkey."

"Denise! You're forgetting! The first thing you do—quickly, before you call the cops—is to put that key back on his ring!"

"Oh. Yes. Well, I wouldn't have forgotten. It's just that I'm against the whole thing and it's making me nervous. But I won't forget and I wouldn't have forgotten."

"All right. Watch it . . . So there he is, his own key neatly on his own ring, and his body on the window sill or just inside or just outside. Why? Why does a man climb in his own window?"

"Because of you, someone will say."

"Nonsense. George doesn't know a thing about me and you, and besides, everybody in town realizes he considers me his buddy-buddy. Besides which, I am nose-deep in an all-night poker game twenty miles from here."

"And you'd better get back to it."

"I've alibi-ed every guy in that game. They wouldn't dare let me down . . . So there he is, dangling over the window sill. And why? Even forgetting that you'd naturally shoot at a man who comes through the window there's the other angle—you've shot your husband in *unknowing self-defense*. For, mild little guy or not, he's got a rep as a wife murderer—and everybody'll find it out at the trial—and why else should he establish an alibi in Millville and then come sneaking home in the middle of the night? *And* he'll probably have a return ticket in his pocket, being he's so methodical, *and* he won't have tried to get a taxi at the station—"

"Because he's not a *total* idiot. Who can get a taxi in Clewton at four thirty in the morning?"

"But it doesn't sound like that at a trial, Denise. These little things pile up."

"Like how I happen to have a loaded gun in my hand?"

"Why not? There's that collection in the garage. Mostly for hunting, but there *are* some pistols."

"And who knows that?"

"The kid—James Pul-whatever-his-name-is—who helped him put in that fancy cement drain. He saw the collection and asked about it. You told me so."

"Yeah, and he also asked if they were loaded, and George explained that they're all empty, and that they're always empty."

"So what? The kid's simple-minded, isn't he?"

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"You sure do want it two ways to Sunday. He's not too simple-minded to testify to the existence of the guns, but he is too simple-minded to be believed when he says they weren't loaded . . . I'll never understand how you talk me into these things."

"Denise, a simple-minded witness will be believed on whether or not he saw something, especially if that thing is still there for a jury to examine; but on something invisible, like the bullets inside a gun —who's to trust him?"

"The jury, probably. Oh, well—what worries me most is that they may never see that George had a motive."

"Not *see*? Twenty-five thousand bucks isn't a motive? With *his* record?"

"But Bernie, Charlie Applebaum has the kind of flatfooted honesty that everyone believes. Following your instructions, fool that I am, I impressed Charlie with the fact that I did not want George to know I was insuring my life in his favor—to say nothing of the fact that it was for a little sum like twenty-five thousand bucks. I was strong about it; he believed me; and they'll believe him."

"They sure will, and it'll gain you a lot of sympathy. A thoughtful loving wife, that's you. But Mrs. Binns works part-time for the Applebaums, as well as for George."

"Oh, I never thought of that. But would she necessarily find out?"

"No, not necessarily—so I told her. Just dropped it in hint form, about how thoughtful you are, when I stopped by to take George to lunch after I had made sure George had already left for lunch."

"Oh."

" 'Oh,' and how. You tell your lawyer about Mrs. Binns, he calls Mrs. Binns, and everyone knows George had a motive."

"Well, maybe. And maybe you're a living genius although I've had a lot of years to disprove it. My experience has been that the trickier your plots get, the more you get yourself tangled in them. *Some*one *some*times makes money—but it isn't you and it isn't me. But anyway, all right; I'm stuck with it now. So. I hear someone prowling, I dash for the gun, I shoot him. My, oh, my, it's George! Whaddaya know! So, after having stuck the key in his little key case and the list in his pocket—a little item you forgot, George, and one that Mrs. Binns would spot in a moment—I yelp for the police. And then I am prostrated, or as prostrated as this town will believe of me. And you, my pet, you stay as far from me as if I were the cobra of my repute, understand?"

"But—wouldn't I naturally rally round?"

"No, you wouldn't naturally rally round! If this thing were on the level you would instantly consider lighting out for Oshkosh via Timbuctoo. You will be credited with

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just enough brains to stifle that instinct, but no more. Stay away from me the way everyone will expect, understand? And now, for God's sake get back to that poker game!"

George watched his buddy-buddy leave, and then went into the garage. He removed the new drain that James Pullman had helped him install, and took out the ammunition that was stored beneath it in a watertight compartment. He had always believed in being careful—and farsighted. He loaded one of the guns, and rearranged the collection slightly.

Then, wearily, he returned to the garden and settled under the flowering pear tree to do a little thinking. Uppermost in his thoughts—oddly in the circumstances—was Mrs. Binns. She had never mentioned Denise's increased deceased value. Although he was a charitable man, it occurred to George that Mrs. Binns probably did not wish to put Denise in a good light.

The pear blossoms smelled very sweet in the warm night air . . .

The Reverend Mr. Spring had long since stopped flinching when addressed as "Reverend Spring," but he did rather enjoy "Your Honor" although he recognized that it was an equally improper form of address. At inquests he always demurred, lightly and slightly, at the beginning of a hearing, and then, having done his duty, he relaxed.

"Your Honor," Chief of Police Wilson said, intelligently but with unusual belligerence, "I suggest that all possibilities are not being taken into account."

"You do? Well, I, on the other hand, feel that all the possibilities are impossible to encompass. The gun could have been shot by a visitor from the moon—"

"I'm talking about *possibilities*."

"You're still in the world of science fiction, Chief Wilson—you haven't caught up with this wide world of facts we live in. Well, never mind. Suffice it to say that the deceased saw someone come through her window and tried to defend herself with the only weapon at her command, which was unfortunately empty, as were all the guns in the garage. Bravely enough, she waved her empty gun but succeeded only in scaring the intruder into shooting her. This did not deter him from looting the bedroom and stealing her jewelry."

"All for a ring set with a quarter-carat diamond and a gold-filled wrist watch?"

"How did he know what he was going to find?" the Coroner asked.

"Burglars usually 'case the joint,' as we say in my field, sir. They don't take chances on murder raps for a gold-filled wrist watch which, by the way, is practically unfenceable." The Chief shook his head stubbornly. "I suggest that one of the

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guns in the garage was loaded, used, removed, and disposed of."

"You do? Despite the testimony of the bereaved that the guns were always empty? Despite the verification by James Pullman to the effect that he is fairly certain that the collection is the same as when he last saw it some six months ago?"

"'Fairly certain'! James *Pullman?*" The Chief of Police seemed in danger of apoplexy.

"Exactly. And," the Coroner added stiffly, "there is no need to be uncharitable. James Pullman was testifying to the best of his ability and we will do well to remember that he has nothing to gain or lose. Now, let us call upon Mr. Charles Applebaum."

After Mr. Applebaum had testified, the Coroner brought the Chief to the very brink of bursting.

"Now, Mr. Applebaum," the Coroner asked, "you are certain that Mrs. Sommers took out this twenty-five-thousand dollar policy entirely of her own accord?"

"Yes, your Honor."

"No one knew about it other than Mrs. Sommers herself?"

"Mr. Spring! Your Honor!"

"Yes, Chief Wilson?"

"You can't—one minute, huh?" The Chief responded to a tug on his coat-tail. Then he stood erect again, armed with a tricky legal gambit. "Isn't it possible, sir," he asked, "that you might be—ah—leading the witness?"

"Um?" Mr. Spring considered, and then rendered an honest verdict: "Perhaps so. Would you care to rephrase the question?"

"*Yes*, sir. *Thank* you, sir. Charlie, isn't it possible that someone else knew about the policy?"

Charlie Applebaum considered. Then he said slowly, "Well, Chief, anything is possible, no? But she seemed very anxious that no one know, which was perfectly all right with me, and I'll tell you one thing—no one knew through my brother Herman or me."

"Mrs. Binns was employed by both—"

"We were *particularly* careful about Mrs. Binns." Knowing Charlie Applebaum, everyone in the court believed that, so there was no point in the Chief's underlining the fact by asking that Mrs. Binns be called. He said, "Well, now, in view of the record of the—" The Chief caught the Coroner's eye, and dropped the matter of George Sommers' past experiences in bereavement. He said instead, "In view of *everything*, wasn't it unusual of you to write the policy?"

"No. Perhaps if *Mr.* Sommers had asked to insure his *wife* . . . But it wasn't that way, it was the other way around. It was *Mrs.* Sommers who was being investigated and she had never carried insurance before. The policy was granted without hesitation. And maybe it was also because—" He paused and then said, "Well, I have never written a bad policy and the company knows

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it. And as for my own feelings in the matter, I just felt that it was a generous gesture on Mrs. Sommers' part. He insured himself in her favor, and she wanted it to be mutual."

A tiny wave of sympathy for Denise Sommers flickered through the court, despite the usual dislike of her. In that respect, and in the response to James Pullman's testimony, Bernie had had the right of it to a greater degree than Denise would have believed possible. On the other hand, her indictment of his tricky plots held true: *some*one *some*times made money, but it was never Denise and it was never Bernie.

The Chief made one more try: Mr. Spring would have resisted, but George—gently, his large, handsome face sad but in sympathy with the Chief's sense of duty—suggested that the Chief be permitted to discuss George's movement on the unhappy night in question. What resulted was a wealth of testimony as to George's invariable thirty-mile-an-hour pace, the garage attendant's corroboration to that effect by proving that George was just sixty miles out of Clewton two hours after his departure, and the testimony of the night clerk in Millville who checked Mr. George Sommers into the Williams Hotel at 2:18 on the morning of May second and had a little punched card to prove it. He had been on duty from midnight until nine in the morning, and so he himself had been the one to honor Mr. Sommers' request that he be called at eight in the morning, and he had nodded to Mr. Sommers when George entered the dining room at eight twenty-five.

"You didn't see him between two fifteen and eight thirty, then?" Mr. Spring asked.

"I did not."

Mr. Spring acknowledged the Chief's wildly waving hand. "You wish to ask a question, Chief Wilson?"

"If you please, sir—your Honor." To the desk clerk he said, "There is a back way out of the Williams?"

"Two of them. But when you are in the guests' part of the hotel you can't reach them, or the street, except through the lobby."

"And so you think you would have seen Mr. Sommers if he had left?"

"I know so. Indisputably."

"Even if you were asleep?"

"Asleep! If I were to fall asleep I would lose my job!"

And that took care of all the other questions the Chief could think of.

In the back of the room, hunched into his coat in a way that defied the joyous weather and succeeded in making him look narrower than anyone would have believed possible, sat Bernie Kleber. His misery was so great and so apparent that the good citizens of Clewton actu-

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ally felt a touch of pity for the fellow.

Bereft—bereft as he would not have believed possible—of the common sense and practical advice of Denise, he had found thought difficult, decision impossible. It was half an adult lifetime since he had thought problems through unaided and unbraked, and so he had said to himself, "What would Denise say about my going to the inquest?" The answer was, "Go, you damn fool! It would be ridiculous and suspicious if you didn't."

So Bernie attended.

But the application of Denise-at-a-Vast-Remove would stretch just so far. He could not imagine her advice in a really complex situation, and he was caught in one, at the moment and forever after.

For—naturally avoiding any possible witnesses when he was supposed to be in a hot poker game twenty miles away—Bernie had left by the little-used road that passed under the hill that bore the Sommerses' three-tree orchard. And there, just as naturally, he had seen George's car.

Bernie had not known what to do, except to beat it for his poker game. He had not figured out what he could do then, and he could not figure out what he could do now.

He never did figure it out.

The Reverend Mr. Spring, who had married them five months before, gave the George Sommerses a going-away luncheon when they decided to leave town, about a year after the tragic loss that had overtaken Mr. Sommers.

By his own confession George Sommers had not wanted to leave. He sought out Mr. Spring one early afternoon and put the problem to him: "Mrs. Binns—that is, Mrs. Sommers—wants us to go to California," he said forlornly. "I am against it. Will you give me the benefit of your opinion?"

"My dear fellow," Mr. Spring said, "do sit down here under the pear tree—they smell so good this time of year, don't you think?—and let us thrash the question out."

They thrashed, Mr. Spring doing the beating, George supplying the grain and husks. But there was mostly grain; George was entirely honest. "In California," he said, "I can work only in a chartered house—can't open my own little office—that is, not profitably. But, on the other hand, there's the insurance money. It brings in something over two thousand, and there's no question but that I can make another four. What I don't really see is *why* we should go."

Mr. Spring probed, and George responded, until finally Mr. Spring thought he had the matter clear. It was, he said, a psychological problem: "She's a woman, my dear George. A good woman—loyal, brave, honest, kind, but—a woman. She doesn't want to live in another woman's house, even if you did

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demolish the garage and build another one, and put a picture window in the kitchen, and changed your shady lawn into a rock garden—by the way, I can never thank you enough for the pear tree. No, she wants her own home, and possibly she is sensitive to the possibility of—excuse me, George—of gossip. There isn't any, really, but you know how women are."

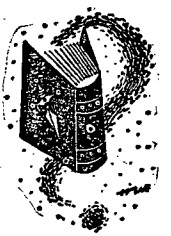
George was persuaded.

Actually, Mrs. Binns—Ella—had been a little less sensitive and a little more practical. Knowing George's unhappy history—he told all his wives before he married them; it gained their sympathy and of course he wanted to play fair—knowing that history and loving George very dearly was what had decided her.

"We don't need so much money," she had said. "As for why I want to go—well, I'll tell you the truth, George. It's because I love you and so I can't help worrying. Suppose something unusual should happen to me? Suppose I was to die in some sort of freak accident? In California, which is as far away as we can get, I figure that no one would be likely to persecute you. But in this state . . . !"

"That's true," George said slowly. He thought how good she was, and how loyal, and how humorless. Denise would have turned the situation into a snappy joke.

Still, if a bit humorless and boring, wife Number Four was certainly happy and loyal and loving during the brief remainder of her life.



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a new story by **DAVIS GRUBB**

A strange, strange story by the author of that strange and powerful novel, THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER . . . *about the gold-haired child, Eva, and her friends who lived under the davenport, and especially of the Creole doll with the black tresses and the lovely coffee-colored skin . . .*

YOU NEVER BELIEVE ME

by DAVIS GRUBB

IT WAS NOT THAT NELL HADN'T done everything she could. Many a windy, winter afternoon she had spent reading to the child from *Pilgrim's Progress* and Hadley's *Comportment for Young Ladies* and from the gilded, flowery leaves of *A Spring Garland of Noble Thoughts.* And countless times she had reminded the little girl that we must all strive to make ourselves useful in this Life and that five years old wasn't too young to begin to learn. But none of it had helped.

And there were times when Nell actually regretted ever taking in the curious, gold-haired child that tragic winter when Nell's brother Amos and his foolish wife had been killed. Eva stubbornly spent her days dreaming under the puzzle tree or sitting on the stone steps of the icehouse making up tunes or squatting on the little square carpet stool in the dark parlor and whispering softly to herself.

"Eva!" cried Nell one day. "Who are you talking to?"

"To my friends," said Eva quietly, "Mister Peppercorn and Sam and—"

"Eva!" cried Nell. "I will not have this nonsense any longer—you know perfectly well there's no one in this parlor but you."

"They live under the davenport," explained Eva patiently. "And behind the Pianola. They're very small, so it's easy for them."

"Eva, hush that talk this instant!" cried Nell.

"You never believe me," sighed the child, "when I tell you things are real."

"They aren't real," said Nell. "And I forbid you to make up such tales any longer. When I was a little girl I never had time for such mischievous nonsense. I was far too busy doing the bidding of my God-fearing parents and learning to be useful in this world."

Dusk was settling like a golden smoke over the willows down by the river shore when Nell finished

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pruning her roses that afternoon. And she was stripping off her white linen garden gloves on her way to the kitchen to see if Suse and Jessie had finished their Friday baking. Then she heard Eva speaking again, far off in the dark parlor, the voice quiet at first and then rising curiously.

"Eva!" cried Nell, hurrying down the hall, determined to put an end to the foolishness once and for all. "Eva! Come out of that parlor this very instant."

Eva appeared in the doorway, her round face streaming and broken with grief, her fat dimpled fist pressed to her mouth in grief.

"*You* did it!" the child shrieked. "*You* did it!"

Nell stood frozen, wondering how she could meet this.

"They *heard* you!" Eva cried, stamping her fat shoe on the bare, thin carpet. "They heard you say you didn't want them to stay here! And now they've all gone away—*all* of them, Mister Peppercorn and Mingo and Sam and Popo—"

Nell grabbed the child by the shoulders and began to shake her—not hard but with a mute, hysterical compulsion.

"Hush up," Nell said thickly. "Hush, Eva—stop it this very instant!"

"You did it!" wailed the golden child, her head lolling back in a passion of grief and bereavement. "My *friends!* You made them all go away!"

All that evening Nell sat alone in her bedroom trembling with curious satisfaction. For punishment Eva had been sent to her room without supper and Nell sat listening now to the even, steady sobs far off down the hall.

It was dark and on the river shore a night bird tried its note cautiously against the silence. Down in the pantry, the dishes done, Suse and Jessie, dark as night itself, drank coffee by the great stove and mumbled over stories of the old times before the war. Nell fetched her smelling salts and sniffed the frosted stopper of the flowered bottle till her trembling stopped.

Then, before the summer seemed half begun, it was late August. And one fine, sharp morning, blue with the smoke of burning leaves, the steamboat "Samantha Collins" docked at Cresap's Landing. Eva sat, as she had been sitting most of that summer, alone on the cool, worn steps of the icehouse, staring moodily at the daisies bobbing gently under the burden of droning, golden bees.

"Eva!" Nell called cheerfully from the kitchen window. "Someone's coming today."

Eva sighed and said nothing, glowering mournfully at the puzzle tree and remembering the wonderful stories that Mingo used to tell.

"Grandfather's boat landed this morning, Eva," said Nell. "He's been all the way to New Orleans and

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I wouldn't be at all surprised if he brought his little girl a present."

Eva smelled suddenly the wave of honeysuckle that wafted sweet and evanescent from the gangled blooms on the stone wall; and she sighed, recalling the high, gay lilt of Mister Peppercorn's voice when he used to sing her his enchanting songs.

"Eva!" called Nell again. "Did you hear what Aunt Nell said? Your Grandpa's coming home this afternoon."

"Yes'm," said Eva lightly, hugging her fat knees and tucking her plain little skirt primly under her bottom.

And supper that night was quite pleasant. Jessie had made raspberry cobblers for the Captain and fetched in a prize ham from the meat-house, frosted and feathery with mold, and Suse had baked fresh that forenoon till the ripe, yeasty smell of hot bread seemed everywhere in the world.

Nobody said a word while the Captain told of his trip to New Orleans, and Eva listened to his stern old voice and remembered Nell's warnings never to interrupt when he was speaking, and only to speak herself when spoken to.

When supper was over, the Captain sat back and sucked the coffee briskly from his white mustache. Then rising without a word, he went to the chair by the crystal umbrella stand in the hallway and fetched back a long box wrapped in brown paper.

Eva's eyes rose slowly and shone over the rim of her cup.

"I reckon this might be something to please a little girl," said the old man gruffly, thrusting the box into Eva's hands.

"For me?" whispered Eva.

"Well now," grunted the Captain. "I didn't fetch this all the way up the river from N'Orleans for any *other* girl in Cresap's Landing!"

And presently string snapped and paper rustled expectantly and the cardboard box was open at last and Eva stared at the creature which lay within and Eva's eyes were shining and wide with sheerest disbelief.

"Numa," she whispered.

"What did you say, Eva?" said Nell. "Don't mumble your words."

"It's Numa!" cried the child, searching both their faces for the wonder that was hers. "They told me she'd be coming but I didn't know Grandpa was going to bring her. Mister Peppercorn said—"

"Eva," whispered Nell.

Eva looked gravely at her Grandfather, hoping not to seem too much of a tattletale, hoping that he would not deal too harshly with Nell for the fearful thing she had done that summer day.

"Aunt Nell made them all go away," she began.

Nell leaned across the table clutching her linen napkin tight in her white knuckles.

"Father," she whispered. "Please

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don't discuss it with her. She's made up all this nonsense and I've been half out of my mind all this summer. First it was some foolishness about people who live under the davenport in the parlor—"

Eva sighed and stared at the gaslight winking brightly on her Grandfather's watch chain and felt somewhere the start of tears.

"It's really true," she said boldly. "She never believes me when I tell her things are real. She made them all go away. But one day Mister Peppercorn came back. It was just for a minute. And he told me they were sending me Numa instead!"

And then she fell silent and simply sat, heedless of Nell's shrill voice trying to explain. Eva sat staring with love and wonder at the Creole doll with the black tresses and the lovely coffee-colored skin.

Whatever the summer had been, the autumn, at least, had seemed the most wonderful season of Eva's life. In the fading afternoons of that dying Indian Summer she would sit by the hour, not brooding now, but holding the dark doll in her arms and weaving a shimmering spell of fancy all their own.

And when September winds stirred, sharp and prescient with new seasons, Eva, clutching her dark new friend would tiptoe down the hallway to the warm, dark parlor and sit by the Pianola to talk some more.

Nell came down early from her afternoon nap one day and heard Eva's excited voice far off in the quiet house. She paused with her hand on the newel post, listening, half wondering what the other sound might be, half thinking it was the wind nudging itself wearily against the old, white house.

Then she peered in the parlor door.

"Eva," said Nell. "What are you doing?"

It was so dark that Nell could not be certain of what she saw. She went quickly to the window and threw up the shade.

Eva sat on the square carpet stool by the Pianola, her blue eyes blinking innocently at Nell and the dark doll staring vacuously up from the cardboard box beside her.

"Who was here with you?" said Nell. "I distinctly heard two voices."

Eva sat silent, staring at Nell's stiff high shoes. Then her great eyes slowly rose.

"You never believe me," the child whispered, "when I tell you things are real."

Old Suse, at least, understood things perfectly.

"How's the scampy baby doll your Grandpappy brought you, lamb?" the old Negro woman said that afternoon as she perched on the high stool by the pump, paring apples for a pie. Eva squatted comfortably on the floor with Numa and watched the red and white rind

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curl neatly from Suse's quick, dark fingers.

"Life is hard," Eva sighed philosophically. "Yes, oh, yes, life is hard. That's what Numa says!"

Such talk for a youngster! Suse grunted, plopping another white quarter of fruit into the pan of spring water. "What you studyin' about Life for? And you only five!"

"Numa tells me," sighed Eva, her great blue eyes far away. "Oh, yes! She really does! She says if Aunt Nell ever makes her go away she'll take me with her."

"Take you!" chuckled Suse, brushing a bluebottle from her arm. "Take you where?"

"Where the woodbine twineth," sighed Eva.

"Which place?" said Suse, cocking her head.

"Where the woodbine twineth," Eva repeated patiently.

"I declare!" Suse chuckled. "I never done heard tell of *that* place!"

Eva cupped her chin in her hand and sighed reflectively.

"Sometimes," she said presently, "we just talk. And sometimes we play."

"What y'all play?" asked Suse obligingly.

"Doll," said Eva. "Oh, yes, we play doll. Sometimes Numa gets tired of being doll and I'm the doll and she puts me in the box and plays with me."

She waved her hand casually to show Suse how really simple it all was.

Suse eyed her sideways with twinkling understanding, the laughter struggling behind her lips.

"She puts *you* in that little bitty box?" said Suse. "And *you*'s a doll?"

"Yes, oh, yes," said Eva. "She really does. May I have an apple please, Suse?"

When she had peeled and rinsed it, Suse handed Eva a whole, firm Northern Spy.

"Don't you go and spoil your supper now, lamb," she warned.

"Oh!" cried Eva. "It's not for me. It's for Numa."

And she put the dark doll in the box and stumped out the back door to the puzzle tree.

Nell came home from choir practice at five that afternoon and found the house so silent that she wondered for a moment if Suse or Jessie had taken Eva down to the landing to watch the evening Packet pass. The kitchen was empty and silent except for the thumping of a pot on the stove, and Nell went out into the yard and stood listening by the rose arbor.

Then she heard Eva's voice. And through the failing light she saw them beneath the puzzle tree.

"Eva!" cried Nell. "Who is that with you?"

Eva was silent as Nell's eyes strained to piece together the shadow and substance of the dusk. Nell ran quickly down the lawn to the puzzle tree. But only Eva was there.

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Off on the river the evening Packet blew dully for the bend. Nell felt the wind, laced with autumn, stir the silence round her like a web.

"Eva!" called Nell. "I distinctly saw another child with you. Who was it?"

Eva sighed and sat cross-legged in the grass with the long box and the dark doll beside her.

"You never believe me—" she began softly, staring guiltily at the apple core in the grass.

"Eva!" cried Nell, brushing a firefly roughly from her arm so that it left a smear of dying gold. "I'm going to have an end to this nonsense right now."

And Nell picked up the doll in the cardboard box and started toward the house. Eva screamed in terror.

"Numa!" she wailed.

"You may cry all you please, Eva," said Nell. "But you may not have your doll back until you come to me and admit that you don't really believe all this nonsense about fairies and imaginary people."

"Numa!" screamed Eva, jumping up and down in the grass and beating her fists against her bare, grass-stained knees, "Numa!"

"I'm putting this box on top of the Pianola, Eva," said Nell. "And I'll fetch it down again when you confess to me that there was another child playing with you this afternoon. I cannot and will not countenance falsehoods."

"Numa said," screamed Eva, "that if you made her go away—"

"I don't care to hear another word!" said Nell, walking ahead of the wailing child up the dark lawn toward the house.

But the words sprang forth like Eva's very tears.

"—she'd take me away with her!" she screamed.

"Not another word," said Nell. "Stop your crying and go up to your room and get undressed for bed—this instant!"

And she went into the parlor and placed the doll box on top of the Pianola next to the music rolls.

A week later the thing ended. And years after that autumn night Nell, mad and simpering, would tell the tale again, and stare at the pitying, doubting faces in the room around her, and then she would whimper to them in a parody of the childish voice of Eva herself: "You never believe me when I tell you things are real."

It was a pleasant September evening and Nell had been to a missionary meeting with Nan Snyder that afternoon and she had left Nan at her steps and was hurrying up the tanbark walk by the icehouse when she heard the prattling laughter of Eva far back in the misty shadows of the lawn.

Nell ran swiftly into the house to the parlor—to the Pianola. The doll box was not there.

She hurried to the kitchen door

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and peered out through the netting into the dusky river evening. She did not call to Eva then, but went out and stripped a willow switch from the little tree by the stone wall and tiptoed softly down the lawn. A light wind blew from the river meadows, heavy and sweet with wetness, like the breath of cattle.

They were laughing and joking together as Nell crept soundlessly upon them—speaking low as children do, with wild, delicious intimacy, and then bubbling high with laughter that cannot be contained.

Nell approached silently, feeling the dew soak through to her ankles, clutching the switch tightly in her hand. She stopped and listened for a moment, for suddenly there was but one voice—a low and wonderfully lyric sound that was not the voice of Eva.

Then Nell stared wildly down through the misshapen leaves of the puzzle tree and saw the dark child sitting with the doll box in its lap.

"So!" cried Nell, stepping suddenly through the canopy of leaves. "You're the darkie child who's been sneaking up here to play with Eva."

The child put the box down and jumped to its feet with a low cry of fear as Nell sprang forward, the willow switch flailing furiously about the dark ankles.

"Now scat!" cried Nell. "Get on home where you belong and don't you ever come back—you hear me?"

For an instant the dark child stared in horror, first at Nell and then at the doll box; its sorrowing, somnolent eyes were brimming with wild words and a grief for which it had no tongue; its lips were trembling as if there were something Nell should know that she might never learn again after that autumn night was gone.

"Go on I say!" Nell shouted, furious.

The switch flickered about the dark arms and legs faster than ever. And suddenly with a cry of anguish the dark child turned and fled through the tall grass toward the meadow and the willows on the river shore.

Nell stood trembling for a moment, letting the rage ebb slowly from her body.

"Eva!" she called out presently. "Eva!"

There was no sound but the dry steady racket of the frogs by the landing.

"Eva!" cried Nell. "Come to me this instant—do you hear me?"

She picked up the doll box and marched angrily up toward the lights in the kitchen.

"Eva!" screamed Nell. "You're going to get a good switching for this!"

A night bird in the willow tree by the stone wall cried out once and started up into the still, affrighted dark. Nell did not call again—for suddenly, like the mood

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of the autumn night, the very sound of her voice had begun to frighten her.

And when she was in the kitchen, Nell screamed so loudly that Suse and Jessie, long asleep in their shack down below the icehouse, woke wide and stared wondering into the dark. Nell stared for a long moment after she had screamed, not believing, really, for it was at once so perfect and yet so unreal. Trembling, Nell ran back out onto the lawn.

"Come back!" screamed Nell hoarsely into the tangled far-off shadows by the river. "Come back! Oh, please, please come back!"

But the dark child was gone forever.

And Nell, creeping back at last to the kitchen, whimpering and slack-mouthed, looked again at the lovely little dreadful creature in the doll box—the gold-haired, plaster Eva with the eyes too blue to be real.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

first publication in America

AUTHOR:	**NICHOLAS BLAKE**
TITLE:	***Long Shot***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Nigel Strangeways
LOCALE:	England
TIME:	Before World War II
COMMENTS:	*A story, with Chestertonian overtones, by the famous poet (C. Day Lewis) and mystery writer—a story never before published in the United States . . .*

"HIS LORDSHIP," ANNOUNCED AMphlett as he received me in the hall, "his lordship is in the rookery, sir."

He crooked a little finger at the maid. "Alice, Mr. Strangeways' baggage. We have put you in your old room, sir. I trust you will enjoy your visit."

Did I detect a faint, quite unprofessional lack of conviction in the butler's tone? Why shouldn't I enjoy my visit? Any civilized person is bound to enjoy staying at a beautiful, perfectly run country house, where money is no object. Besides, Gervase was an old friend of mine, and I hadn't seen him for nearly two years.

"I think I'll go straight out," I said.

"Very good, sir. His lordship has been anticipating your arrival with the keenest pleasure."

I noticed that Gervase had still not succeeded in training dear old Amphlett to disregard his title. Twenty years ago, as a young man, Gervase had had a sort of Tolstoyan conversion. The eldest son of the Earl of Wessex, he had decided to give up his title and be called by the family name, plain Mr. Musbury. Friends, neighbors, relations,

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servants—all had to toe the line. That was the time he started to run his estate on a cooperative basis.

His struggles to become poor had been singularly unsuccessful, however. His cooperative farming prospered; the fortune left him in securities by his American mother throve on his neglect of it. And if he lost any friends through discarding his title, it may be assumed that they were not worth keeping anyway.

As we walked over the lawn, Amphlett delicately mopped his brow. It was certainly a very hot day for April. The cawing of rooks in the elm trees we were approaching sounded cool as a waterfall. I quite envied Gervase up there; but I didn't much fancy climbing the rope ladder to reach him.

Looking up, I descried a small object, which presently resolved itself into a ginger-beer bottle on a string descending erratically from the top of the nearest elm.

A young footman silently received it, took a fresh bottle from a silver tray, tied the string round its neck, and gave a signal to haul away. The bottle was drawn up again into the heights, toward a narrow, well-camouflaged platform laid across two of the topmost branches.

"You've got a new footman, I see. A nice-looking young chap."

"Henry gives satisfaction, sir," said Amphlett gloomily, and not—I thought—with entire conviction.

"Been with you long?" I asked.

"Some eight months, sir."

Henry had held his job, under the exacting Amphlett, for eight months. Well, perhaps I was wrong. Perhaps he did give satisfaction.

"His lordship finds it very hot up there," remarked Amphlett.

I perceive that the reader may be feeling a certain resistance to my narrative. Either this friend of yours was a lunatic, he is saying, or else you're making the whole thing up. That is because he did not know Gervase Musbury.

Gervase was an eccentric who could afford to give his eccentricities a blank check and knew how to run them at a profit. Eccentricity, as I see it, is nothing more than the visible track of the libido taking a short cut to the desired object. When Amphlett told me his master was in the rookery, knowing Gervase I never doubted but that he was there for some rational purpose.

Equally when I saw the bottle traveling up to that eyrie in the elm top, I accepted it as something quite natural; it was much simpler for Gervase to haul up his ginger-beer than for the footman to scale the rope ladder every time his master wanted a drink.

The ladder began to wriggle. Gervase had seen me and was climbing down—with great agility for a man approaching fifty. He jumped the last six feet, put his hands eagerly on my shoulders, and said, "You've not changed, Nigel."

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Nor had he. The piercing blue eyes, the mustache cut like a thicker version of Adolphe Menjou's and appearing to bristle with electricity, the infectious manner of the enthusiast—Gervase was just the same.

"You'd better stay here, Henry," he said to the footman. "I'll be back presently." Then to me, "Henry gives me my bottles at regular intervals. Like a baby."

His blue eyes grew abstracted. "Let me see, Amphlett: who have we staying in the house? I am rather out of touch."

"Your brother and his wife, sir. Mr. Prew. And Miss Camelot."

"Ah, just so." He took my arm. "Better come and meet them. Get it over. Then we can spend the rest of the afternoon watching the rooks. Absorbing, I assure you. I built a nice little hide up there before the nesting season. Fit you in easily."

"No, Gervase." I said firmly. "There is not room for two on that appalling little platform. And I am not madly interested in the habits of rooks. Since when have you taken up bird-watching?"

"Just a relaxation, dear boy, that's all. I got a bit stale this winter, working on a new explosive. MacMaster called me in. Working against time—that's the trouble. We shall have war in two years. Or sooner."

We emerged from the shadow of the elm trees, to be greeted by a small, stoutish man, whose photograph I had seen often enough in the papers. It was Thomas Prew, M.P., a notable defender of lost causes. If Gervase was right, the hardest-fought cause of Prew's life was now as good as lost too, for he was an out-and-out pacifist, who had gone to prison for his convictions in the last war and cried them up and down the country ever since.

I was surprised to find the pacifist Member of Parliament here, and when we left Prew asked Gervase about it.

"Oh, Tom Prew's an honest man," he said. "Besides, he's an education for my brother. You know what an old warmonger Hector is. He and Tom had quite an argument at dinner the other night. Tom won on a technical knockout. Hector and Diana have barely been on speaking terms with him since. Let's go and find them."

We found them at last in the garage yard, up to the elbows in the engine of their Bentley. I had almost forgotten what a magnificent couple they made. Tall, handsome, golden-haired—there was something leonine about them, both in their restlessness and in repose. Hector had all his elder brother's superabundance of energy, but lacked Gervase's many outlets for it: war might well prove his release and *métier*.

Diana I admired without liking; she was too ambitious, too overpowering for my taste. Besides, she was wrapped up in her husband.

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They gave one, more than any other couple I ever met, the impression of being a team, of physical and mental coordination. I felt it again now, watching them as they worked in a sort of telepathic unison over the engine of the car in which they tore restlessly over the face of Europe.

My sensation was obviously shared by the beautiful Miss Anthea Camelot, who had been standing by with an odd-man-out expression on her face. She turned to Gervase with relief—and something more than relief, I fancied. Poor girl, I thought: if you were Circe and Sheba rolled into one, your enchantments would break against Gervase; the name written on his heart is burned too deep for any other woman to erase it.

Though ten years younger than Gervase, I had been for a long time his confidant. I was one of the very few people outside his own family who knew about the tragedy of Rose Borthwick. She had been the daughter of one of his father's tenant farmers. Gervase, in his youth, had fallen passionately in love with her. His father, knowing that Gervase was determined to marry the girl, had managed to have her sent away out of his reach.

There were terrible scenes and a final estrangement between Gervase and his father. Gervase had nearly gone off his head, trying to find Rose again. But all his searches were in vain.

I was still thinking of this sad business a quarter of an hour later, as we were all at tea on the lawn. Presently the conversation turned to Hitler.

"We should have called his bluff long ago," said Hector Musbury. "If our politicians hadn't all got cold feet—"

"Your politicians have a responsibility, too," said Thomas Prew, in the beautiful deep voice that contrasted so strangely with his dumpy, rather insignificant figure. "Look at that young man"—he pointed toward Henry, who was standing a little distance away, in the shadow of the elm trees. "Multiply him by several millions. Imagine those millions torn, maimed, rotting in the earth . . . Can you wonder if the politicians have cold feet?"

A shade of anger came over Hector's face. "That's just sentimental special-pleading. The alternatives are possible death or certain slavery for us. Evidently some of you people prefer the idea of being slaves."

Diana flicked a warning glance at him, I noticed. Anthea Camelot broke in, "But Mr. Prew wasn't talking about the politicians. He was talking about the people who'd have to be killed. About Henry. Let's see what *he* thinks. Henry!" she called.

The young footman came a few paces forward. There was a piquant blend of respectfulness and irony on his face.

"Henry, would you rather be

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killed by the Germans or enslaved by them?"

Henry took his time, gazing levelly at us all. "If it comes to that, Miss Camelot," he said at last, "many might think I'm a slave already."

I saw Amphlett flinch. Even for Gervase's equalitarian *ménage*, this was a bit too much. No wonder the old butler had been unconvincing about Henry's giving satisfaction. Diana evidently felt the same. "Your servants, Gervase," she exclaimed: "seem to enjoy a perpetual Saturnalia."

"You mustn't be hard on Henry," said Anthea Camelot. "After all, he's spent most of the day standing at attention over a tray of ginger-beer bottles. If that isn't slavery, my name is Pharaoh."

I was sitting very near Gervase, and got the feeling that the words he now murmured were for my ears alone. "Youth must have its tests, its ordeals," I heard.

Diana broke in, "Oh, dear, I've left my handkerchief indoors. Henry"—she was the kind of woman who gives orders to servants without bothering to look at them—"fetch the handkerchief from my dressing-table."

"My orders are to stay here, madam."

I was afraid there would be an explosion. Gervase evidently intended to give no help: he was glancing quizzically from Diana to the young footman. But Hector was already on his feet, moving toward the house, as though his wife's wish had been communicated to him before she uttered it.

"I'll fetch it," he said.

After tea, Gervase retired up his elm tree again. Hector and Diana set up a target on the lawn and tried to lure the rest of us into archery. But Anthea, well aware no doubt that this particular sport would set off her charms to less advantage than Diana's, indicated that she would not object to my walking her round the rose garden.

As we strolled off, in the wake of Amphlett and Henry who were bearing the tea-things back to the house, we noticed Hector and Diana fastening upon a not-too-obviously-enthusiastic Mr. Prew and beginning to instruct him in the art of drawing a six-foot bow.

"The thin end of the wedge," remarked Anthea. "Start off the wee pacifist on a bow and arrow, and he'll soon be romping round with a loaded Tommy gun."

Gervase's rose garden is a charming enough place even when there are no roses out, with its neat grass walks, its fountains and statues, and the box-hedges yielding their fragrance to the sun. Anthea and I sat down on deck chairs, prepared to enjoy each other's company. At least, I was. But it soon became clear that she had brought me here for a purpose.

"You *are* a detective of sorts, aren't you?" she said.

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"Of sorts. Why?"

Her eyes followed an early butterfly for a moment. "Oh, everything seems so queer here this time."

"Such as?"

"Well, little Prew wandering about like a lost soul, and Hector quarreling with him, and Diana nagging at Gervase about that new footman, and Gervase sitting up a tree ignoring us all."

And ignoring you in particular, I thought. I said, "It's odd, no doubt. But this always was an odd household."

"Gervase does treat young Henry in an extraordinary way, though, don't you think? Spoiling him half the time, and tyrannizing over him the rest. He's hardly let him out of his sight this afternoon, for instance."

"Perhaps it's Henry who's guarding Gervase," I said idly.

"Guarding him!" Anthea gave me a look from her warm, dark eyes. "You'd not say that if—Listen. The other night I came down late to get a book out of the library, and I heard Gervase telling somebody off in the study next door. He was shouting, 'You'll not get any more of my money! I've a better use for it now.' "

"That is interesting. You don't know who he was talking to?"

"No. But any fool could make a good guess. There's only one person in this household who fits the role of blackmailer."

"You're judging Henry on rather flimsy evidence. Why, it might have been Hector. Hasn't Hector been sponging on Gervase most of his life?"

Anthea rose impatiently. I had not taken her seriously enough. Or so she thought. We strolled back to the lawn, where the archers were still at it. Diana made a fine goddess, standing bright-haired with the bow at full stretch. Hector was near her, his hands in the pockets of his tweed jacket. Thomas Prew looked an uninspiring figure beside them.

Diana's arrow flew into the gold. Then she turned to us, her face flushed and excited.

"Now I'll shoot the golden arrow. We used to do it when we were children. Watch, everyone! Henry, you must watch too!"

She made the footman come a little way out from the elm tree and join us on the lawn. Everyone must see her triumph.

She took an ordinary arrow from her quiver and fitted it to the bowstring. "It'll turn to gold in the sky," she said.

Her body bent gracefully back, and she shot straight upward. The dark arrow soared, almost invisible in its speed. The sun had gone down behind the low hill to our west; but, higher up, its rays were still streaming laterally from over the hilltop, so that the arrow was suddenly caught in them, flashed golden, and pursued its course for a little, shining like a gold thread against the sky's deepening blue.

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For us, it was a strangely fascinating sight, a moment of pure innocence. Like children, we all wanted to do it. But the lower the sun sank behind the hill, the higher we had to shoot.

After a quarter of an hour only Hector and Diana could get an arrow up into the golden stream. Then Diana failed. Then Hector made a last effort. His arrow just turned gold before it began to wobble, slowly reversed, and streaked down toward the elms just behind us.

We heard it strike a branch, and fall clattering from branch to branch. The sound of its falling grew and grew, was hideously amplified, as if in a nightmare the arrow had turned into a human body hurtling down.

A few seconds later, the body of Gervase Musbury crashed to the ground, only half a dozen yards from where we stood.

It seemed, for a moment, to put into words what we were all thinking, when Anthea Camelot cried out bitterly to Hector, who was standing there, the bow still in his hand, looking stupid and frightened like a child who has broken some treasured ornament. "You've shot him!"

Diana said, in a brisk, motherly sort of voice, "Don't let's get hysterical. Of course Hector couldn't have shot him."

Thomas Prew was staring at the body, an expression of white horror on his face, his mouth moving soundlessly. It must have been some shock in childhood, some spectacle like this of blood and shattered bone, which created the pacifist in him.

Henry was kneeling beside the body, making as if to lift Gervase's head on to his lap. Then he said, dully, "I think his neck's broken."

"I kept telling him that platform wasn't safe," said Anthea, staring up into the treetops. The rooks, which had risen out of them in hundreds, cawing and crawking when the body fell, were beginning to return.

I stepped forward and put my hand on Henry's shoulder. I could feel it trembling. We gazed down at the wreck of Gervase. His face was a queer bluish-pink color. My heart missed a beat. This was too much: it was grotesque and impossible.

I bent and sniffed at his lips. Then I found, a few yards away on the grass, an object whose fall had been disregarded in the tragic moment—the shattered fragments of a ginger-beer bottle. I picked one of them up. The same scent of peach blossom clung to it as I had smelled on Gervase's lips.

I turned angrily to the cluster of people. "The arrow may have struck him," I said, "and his neck is certainly broken. But what killed him was poison—prussic acid—conveyed to him through that ginger-beer bottle."

An hour later we were all together

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again, sitting round the table in the dining room. The village constable had taken statements, and was now on guard over the body. A superintendent, police surgeon, and the rest of it were on their way from the county town. In the meanwhile, I had made use of Gervase's keys and had the run of his study, where I had found out one or two interesting things.

I looked round the group at the table. Anthea was crying quietly. Thomas Prew's face remained white, dazed, incredulous. Hector, for some reason, was still holding an arrow and the bow, as though it had frozen to his fingers. Only Diana appeared relatively normal.

"I thought we might clear up a few things before the Westchester police come." I said. "Suicide seems to be out of the question. Gervase had no motive for it, he wasn't that kind of person, and there's no farewell message. So I'm afraid he was murdered."

The four of them stirred, almost as if in relief at knowing the worst. "Somehow the poison was introduced into that bottle." I continued flatly. "Gervase hauled it up, drank it in the ginger-beer—prussic acid works very quickly—and was overcome just at the moment when Hector happened to send up his last arrow, and toppled off the platform."

"But how could the poison—?" began Anthea.

"I've been talking to Amphlett. The ginger-beer is kept in the cellar. Only he and Gervase had keys to the cellar. Gervase's key was on the ring in his pocket. So it's unlikely that anyone but he or Amphlett could have tampered with one of the bottles while they were still in the cellar. Amphlett opened the cellar after lunch, gave half a dozen bottles to Henry, who carried them out on a tray, and locked the cellar door again immediately."

"But Henry was out there beside the tray the whole afternoon," said Mr. Prew.

"Yes. The odd thing is that he admits it. Almost like a sentry on guard, swearing he never left his post. He swears no one could have got at the bottles, except during the couple of minutes after tea when he and Amphlett were carrying the tea-things back to the house."

"Well," said Anthea, "you and I were walking over to the rose garden just then, so we can give each other alibis."

"I suppose Mr. Prew, Hector, and I can do the same," said Diana, in a tone of some distaste, as though giving people an alibi was a vulgar and disgusting thing, like giving them ringworm.

"In that case, no one but Henry or Amphlett could have put the poison into the bottle," said Mr. Prew.

"So it would seem. Logically."

"But Amphlett was devoted to Gervase," said Hector after a pause.

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"And Henry wouldn't do it. I mean, he wouldn't murder his own father, would he?"

Anthea gave a gasp of astonishment. It was no surprise to me. I had found a will in Gervase's desk, leaving the bulk of his fortune to Henry Borthwick. There could be little doubt that Henry was Gervase's long-lost child by the love of his youth, Rose Borthwick.

The relationship explained his peculiar treatment of the young man. I remembered him murmuring to me, "Youth must have its tests, its ordeals." There was always method in Gervase's eccentricity. It was quite in character for him to have tested the young man, like the hero in a fairy tale, given him a period of probation, imposing on him the menial duties of a servant.

"So it *was* Henry who was trying to blackmail Gervase," exclaimed Anthea. She told the others what she had heard that night in the library.

"But why," I asked, "should he blackmail Gervase, when Gervase had left him most of his fortune in a will?"

"Is this true?" demanded Diana.

I nodded.

Hector said, "The question about blackmail doesn't seem important now. The point is, Henry *had* a motive for *killing* Gervase. If he knew that Gervase had made a will in his favor, that is."

"We'd better ask him." Before anyone had time to object, I sent Amphlett to fetch Henry. When the young man came in, I asked him, "Did you know Gervase was your father, and was leaving you his fortune?"

"Oh, yes," said Henry, gazing defiantly at us all. "But if you think I murdered him, you're—"

"What else can you expect us to think?"

"I expect you to credit me with some brains. If I'd wanted to kill my father, d'you suppose I'd be fool enough to do it by putting poison in a bottle which points to me as the most likely suspect?"

"There's something in what he says," remarked Mr. Prew. "But who else could have a motive for—"

"There's yourself for one," I interrupted. "You're a militant pacifist. You heard that Gervase was on the way to perfecting a new explosive. Maybe you wanted to spare humanity the horror of it."

"Oh, but that's fantastic!"

"Then there's Diana and Hector. Diana is an ambitious woman, with a not very rich husband and a very rich brother-in-law. Dispose of the latter, and she'd have the means to gratify all her ambitions—at least, she would as soon as Hector's father dies, and he's a very old man now."

"I think perhaps you had better leave these matters to the police," began Diana icily.

I paid no attention to her. "What Anthea heard in the library that night is significant. It fits the theory

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that it was Hector, not Henry, who was demanding money from Gervase. Gervase said, 'You'll not get any more of my money! I've a better use for it now.' A better use for it *now*, because he had found his son, Henry. No doubt Hector then asked him what he meant by the last phrase, and was told that Gervase proposed to leave his money to his son."

"In that case, Nigel, you silly ass, what would be the point of my killing Gervase?" Hector was blushing, yet triumphant, like a boy making a decisive point in a school debate.

"None. Unless you did it in such a way as to incriminate Henry. He would be hanged for your crime, and Gervase's fortune in due course would pass to you. And, I must say, if Henry didn't commit the murder, someone took great pains to make it look as if he did. Why—"

We all started, as Anthea burst out hysterically, "Oh, for God's sake stop this! I loved Gervase. Why not say I did it, because—because he wouldn't look at me? Hell hath no fury—"

"Be quiet, Anthea!" I commanded. "I'm not finished with Hector and Diana yet. You see, two rather peculiar things happened which the police may well ask them to explain."

"Well?" asked Diana indifferently; but I could see her curiosity was aroused.

"It was peculiar that you two, who—Gervase told me—were hardly on speaking terms with Mr. Prew, should suddenly become so chummy with him after tea and insist on showing him how to shoot with the bow. But not peculiar if you wanted him to give you an alibi for just then—the only few minutes in the afternoon when Henry wasn't standing by the ginger-beer bottles. Not peculiar if it was absolutely vital for both of you to be able to prove you didn't go near them."

"But, my dear good Nigel, you've admitted, only a few minutes ago, that no one but Henry or Amphlett could have tampered with that bottle. Why pick on us?" said Hector.

"I said that logically it seemed so. But Diana did another funny thing. She became matey also with Henry—Henry, whom she'd been treating like dirt up to that point."

Mr. Prew and Anthea had grown tense. They were staring at me as if I was the Apocalypse.

"Yes," I went on, "when she was getting ready to shoot the golden arrow, for the first time. Diana called out to Henry to come and watch. Terribly out of character that was, Diana. But suppose you had to get him away from under the elm trees, get him looking up in the sky like the rest of us, following the course of your arrow, for the seven or eight seconds Hector would need to move the few yards to that silver tray under the elms and substitute

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a poisoned bottle of ginger-beer for the one that stood there? Hector," I went on quickly. "where's that handkerchief you fetched for Diana during tea? You never gave it to her, did you?"

Hector was angry now, but he gave me a queer smile of triumph, reached in the poacher's pocket of his tweed coat, and took a handkerchief out of it.

"I see what you're driving at, old boy. The idea is that I really went indoors to fetch a bottle of poisoned ginger-beer? Well, I didn't. I just brought the handkerchief. So now," he advanced on me menacingly, "you'll kindly apologize to my wife for—"

I snatched the handkerchief from him and put it cautiously to my nose.

"As I thought. Since when did you start using a perfume of peach blossom, Diana?" I was round the other side of the table from them now. "You fetched both the handkerchief *and* the poisoned bottle, Hector. In that nice big poacher's pocket. The handkerchief was needed to keep your fingerprints off the bottle, no doubt. It was unlucky for you that some of the poisoned ginger-beer leaked out onto it."

Hector and Diana were certainly a good team. I had hardly finished speaking when they were at the door, Hector threatening us with the arrow he had notched on his bowstring.

"If any of you calls out, he gets this arrow in him. Diana, fetch the car."

Diana was out of the door like a flash. Prew, Anthea, and old Amphlett were staring at Hector, dazed out of all movement. I felt like one of the suitors in the banqueting hall when Odysseus turned his great bow on them. Then I heard a scurry of movement behind me.

Henry had snatched up one of the huge, heavy silver dish-covers from the sideboard and, shielding his face and breast with it, was running headlong at Hector. The bow twanged deeply. The arrow clanged against the edge of the dish-cover, ricocheted off, and stuck quivering in the far wall.

Henry's charge brought Hector down. He half killed Hector before we could pull him off. He would have been a good son to Gervase, if Gervase had lived.

I had loved Gervase too. If I hadn't, I don't think I should have played that trick on Hector.

The perfume on the handkerchief I snatched from him was not peach blossom, not the lethal fragrance of prussic acid at all. The handkerchief smelled of nothing more dangerous than fresh linen, though he *had* used it to hold the poisoned bottle.

Yes, it was a very long shot on my part—as long a shot, in its way, as that last one of Hector's which had just caught the golden gleam, and then fallen into the treetops where Gervase died.

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

In many ways the most entertaining new crime novel of the year was begun almost 50 years ago. THE ASSASSINATION BUREAU, LTD. (McGraw-Hill, $4.50) was left incomplete by Jack London when he died in 1916; EQMM's Robert L. Fish has now added, with no detectable join, the last third. The result is at once a vigorous thriller and a hilarious exercise in logical absurdity, probing the rigorous altruism of wholesale murder with the infallibly comic divining rod of a W. S. Gilbert.

★★★★ **THE GRUDGE, *by Bert and Dolores Hitchins*** (Crime Club, $3.50)
This splendid series on railroad detection combines fascinating procedure with firm novelistic penetration into people and places.

★★★★ **THE 10:30 FROM MARSEILLES, *by Sébastien Japrisot, translated by Francis Price*** (Crime Club, $3.50)
A procedural-plus of marked individuality, by the winner of the Grand Prix de Littérature Policière—the most striking detective import from France since the early Simenons (see below).

★★★★ **THE DECAYED GENTLEWOMAN, *by E. X. Ferrars*** (Crime Club, $3.50)
Light-hearted criminous adventure with fine legal complexities; one of the best books by a consistent (and underrated) professional.

★★★ **FLORENTINE FINISH, *by Cornelius Hirschberg*** (Harper & Row, $3.50)
Lively and informed tale of the W. 47th St. jewelry market rivals Ullman (see last month) as best American first mystery in 1963.

★★★ **THE SAINT IN THE SUN, *by Leslie Charteris*** (Crime Club, $3.50)
Six recent exploits of Simon Templar (from *Saint Mystery Magazine*, 1958–1963), suavely ingenious and agreeable.

Important revivals: Philip MacDonald's THREE FOR MIDNIGHT (Crime Club, $4.50) contains THE RASP (1924), THE RYNOX MURDER (1930) and the superb MURDER GONE MAD (1931). Penguin is now publishing (65¢ each) the 30-year-old novels of Georges Simenon in new translations, including the two books with which Maigret's career was launched: MONSIEUR GALLET DÉCÉDÉ, now called MAIGRET STONEWALLED (#2026) and LE PENDU DE SAINT-PHOLIEN, NOW MAIGRET AND THE HUNDRED GIBBETS (#2025).

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **EDWARD D. HOCH**

TITLE: ***The Perfect Time for the Perfect Crime***

TYPE: Murder Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The two friends didn't agree—could there really be a perfect crime? But they did agree that "hatred is the only true motive that demands perfection" . . .*

THERE IS, OF COURSE, NO SUCH thing as a really *perfect* crime," Wadsworth was saying in that positive tone of voice that Billings had found more and more irritating the past ten years.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that," Billings objected, deliberately stuffing his pipe once again. "Perfect crimes happen every day of the week."

"Come now, Billings, you've been reading mystery stories again!" Wadsworth shifted in the overstuffed chair like a little toad limbering up for the spring. "Do you really think it's a perfect crime simply because someone hasn't been arrested for it?"

Billings lit his pipe, still trying to keep the conversation pleasant. "Some writers on the subject claim that the really perfect crime would be the simple murder of a stranger on a dark street. Muggings, robbery—they happen all the time. Men die, and no one ever seems to be arrested."

"But those crimes are far from *perfect*," Wadsworth insisted, "chiefly because the victim is unknown to the murderer. He only happens along at the proper time. My idea of a really perfect crime would be one in which victim and killer know each other and in which there is a real motive for the crime. A *real* motive, not merely gain through robbery."

"Well," Billings said, "what are the real motives, other than gain? Only fear and hatred, I believe." He put down his pipe for a moment and rose to pour another bit of

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brandy into Wadsworth's glass. It seemed sometimes that they'd been sitting there arguing, discussing, debating all their lives. It seemed—at least, to Billings—that the center of his universe had become these Tuesday evening dinners and disagreements with this man who was no longer really his friend, who had not been his friend for a long time.

Billings wondered, when he thought about it, just how long things could go on like this. Forever? They were both in their late forties. He hated to think ahead to another twenty years of Tuesday night bickerings.

"Fear!" Wadsworth snorted. "A person who kills out of fear can never commit a perfect crime! No, hatred is the only true motive that demands perfection. The hatred of a man for his wife, or a woman for her husband, or . . ."

"Yes, hatred—deep, festering hatred. But such murders happen all the time," Billings said coldly.

"All the time,—but hardly in a perfect manner."

"A husband kills his wife in another man's arms; the jury frees him—the unwritten law. Perfect!"

But Wadsworth only gave another of his annoying snorts. "Far from it! An unplanned act of anger, that's all."

"But the jury frees him," Billings insisted.

"A perfect crime is not one that depends for its success on the whim of a jury."

"What about a supposedly accidental shooting—say, a hunting accident. And suppose no one can prove premeditation."

"Same objection. You must stand trial—at least, go before a grand jury. Again there is nothing certain about the outcome."

"Pretended self-defense?"

"Same objection."

"But perfect crimes *are* committed!" Billings insisted, his voice cold again.

Wadsworth only tapped a short, fat finger on the table. "*Not* deliberately. They are accidental flukes compounded of poor police work or just plain luck on the part of the murderer. I say it is impossible to plan in advance and successfully execute a cold-blooded murder so perfectly that the murderer will never even be brought to trial and will be able to continue living a normal life."

For a long time Billings was silent, deep in thought. When he finally spoke, his voice was very low. "I think, perhaps, that it's all a matter of timing, my friend. There may not be any such thing as a perfect crime, but I believe there might very well be a perfect *time*."

"A what?"

"A perfect time."

"What are you talking about?"

Billings smiled. "Let me think about it some more. We'll continue this discussion next Tuesday evening."

Wadsworth lifted himself to his

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feet. "That's fine by me. I have to be getting home anyway. I'll see you at the usual time."

Billings watched him go down the street. "Yes," he said, "at the usual time."

The following Tuesday was damp and stormy, with a rising wind and a promise of all-night rain. They met for dinner at the little Swiss restaurant which they had long ago agreed on for alternate Tuesdays, and then made their way along the rain-swept streets to Wadsworth's apartment.

"Out of brandy," Wadsworth said, when they had settled in their chairs. "Have a little port?"

"Anything to warm me," Billings said unhappily. He'd been looking forward to the brandy. Now he'd have to wait till his own return home.

Wadsworth came in with two glasses. He looked more than ever like a toad. "Given any more thought to last week's discussion? About the perfect crime?"

"I've given it some thought."

"Decided to commit one?" Wadsworth asked, chuckling as he poured the wine from an amber bottle.

"As a matter of fact, yes."

Wadsworth kept chuckling. "That would be one way of convincing me." He put down the bottle. "I'll visit you in jail."

"I think not. I expect to be successful."

"And how soon is this great event going to take place? This week?"

"Come now, a really perfect crime takes time. Let's see—this is November fifteenth. Suppose we say within six months. Suppose we say that I will commit a perfect crime—"

"A perfect *murder*."

"—a perfect murder on or before May fifteenth of next year."

Wadsworth was laughing now. "This is getting better and better! You agree to my other conditions—that the victim must be someone you know, someone you hate?"

Billings stared hard at him over the rim of his glass. "Of course."

"And the murder must be committed under circumstances that will make you absolutely immune from prosecution?"

"Correct."

"We must have another drink on this! My, my—this will give us conversation for six months of Tuesday night sessions."

Billings watched him carefully, and nodded.

But as autumn yielded to winter, and the snow began to collect on the sidewalk, the Tuesday evening meetings grew less frequent. Billings had a cold, Billings was busy, Billings was out of town. And when Wadsworth at last took to dropping in at Billings' house unexpectedly, he found his friend deep in a mass of thick medical books, poring over pages of tiny type.

"Look," Wadsworth said at last,

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when spring was almost around the corner, "what in hell's the matter with you lately? All winter you've been moping around with those books."

"I have things to learn," Billings answered.

"Not about that foolish perfect crime business! I thought you'd forgotten about it. My God, I do believe you're trying to find some unknown poison! All those books—you'd better stop this, boy—this withdrawing from reality."

But the worst was yet to come.

The following week Billings resigned from his job at the bank and seemed to withdraw into himself and away from real life even more. Wadsworth learned that his friend had been visiting a psychiatrist, and his fears for the man increased.

Then, early in April, came the final blow. One day Billings had gone completely to pieces in the psychiatrist's office, and had been committed to an institution.

The first time Wadsworth went to see Billings he could hardly believe what he saw. The doctor merely shook his head and said it was a form of schizophrenia, and that Billings would need a great deal of rest and care.

"But does he always have to stay in that room?" Wadsworth asked.

The other blinked his eyes kindly. "When the weather is better he can walk outside. Maybe in another month."

Wadsworth talked to his old friend briefly and then went away, promising to return in a few weeks.

The next time things were a bit better, and the time after that the doctor announced that Billings could accompany Wadsworth on a stroll around the grounds. It was a lovely spring day, with birds overhead and a good sampling of leaves already on the trees. Other patients were out too, seemingly unbothered by the high wall that surrounded the place, or the occasional guards they passed on the walks.

Finally, after they'd taken a path that led to the rear of the main building and into a little grove of trees, Wadsworth said, "What do you say we rest on that bench a bit? Mustn't overdo it, you know."

"What?" Billings stared around blankly. "Oh, surely. The bench."

They sat down, and Wadsworth said after an awkward silence, "Whatever happened to you, anyway? What made you go off the deep end? Was it all that medical reading you were doing?"

"I suppose so," Billings said, looking at his visitor steadily, his eyes and voice cold.

"Well, I'm glad to see you're better today."

"Yes, I'm better," Billings answered. "But it's a day late. I was expecting you yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"Today is the sixteenth of May," Billings said, his voice quiet now.

"Yes . . . You're not still re-

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membering those crazy conversations we had, are you? About the perfect crime?"

Billings smiled, and there was something terrifying about it. "I am not only remembering, but I have succeeded in it, my friend."

"Succeeded in committing a perfect murder?"

"A perfect murder." Billings leaned forward, as if to tell his secret. "Those medical books I spent so many months over—I was merely learning everything I could about schizophrenia and related mental disorders. Learning it for only one reason—so I could fake all this!"

"Fake? Fake what?" Wadsworth pulled back a bit on the bench.

"Fake this insanity, of course. I spoke to you of the perfect time, didn't I? Well, this is it! The perfect time to commit the perfect murder is when you're confined to an institution and certified legally insane."

Wadsworth opened his mouth—but no words came out.

Billings leaned closer and said, "They can't even try me for it. And in a year or so I'll suddenly begin to show signs of recovery. Shortly after that I'll be released, free as a bird—and I'll have committed the perfect crime!"

Wadsworth started to rise, but already Billings' left hand was pulling him down.

"Who are you going to kill?" Wadsworth asked, his voice shaky.

Billings' other hand shot out from under his jacket. The hand was holding a stained and weathered knife whose blade was narrow from prolonged sharpening.

"Why, you, of course," Billings said with almost a chuckle. "I thought you knew."

Wadsworth twisted away. "Where did you get that knife?"

"I stole it from the craft shop. I've had a long time to plan this—a long time for my hatred."

The knife glistened suddenly as the sun caught the sweep and thrust of the blade.

The doctor shook his head sadly and looked away. "A terrible thing, terrible! And I thought he was coming along so well!"

They were sitting in the doctor's office, waiting for the police to arrive, with the bloodstained knife on the desk between them. "Don't you think we should have left the knife in the body, Doctor?"

"You needn't worry," the doctor answered reassuringly. "The police won't even press charges when they hear what happened. After all, Billings was legally insane when they brought him here."

"Still, it's an awful thing to kill a man."

"But it was self-defense. You had no choice, Mr. Wadsworth."

Wadsworth nodded sadly, all the time thinking how much simpler the knife had made things. It hadn't even been necessary to use the gun he had brought along—to satisfy his own long-festering hatred.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 261st "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . It is a straightforward tale of crime and detection, told simply, without frills or adornment, and of special interest to suburbanites who commute . . .

The author is in his middle forties and was graduated from Harvard University. He has been a newspaperman for years, chiefly in New England and Maryland, and at the time of this writing he is a "publicist," commuting daily from Connecticut to New York City. But, he adds in the letter accompanying his "first story," writing fiction seems like much more fun than—publicizing? commuting?

Mr. Baldwin's hobbies are bridge, tennis, and building brick walls in his back yard—and, yes, reading mysteries. His ambitions: to write mystery stories and "to be able to play bridge in penny-a-point company (and win)" . . . We can't help wondering: will writing mystery stories raise Mr. Baldwin to penny-a-point company? Will it even help him to win?

THE LAST MAN ABOARD

by WILLIAM BALDWIN

FORTY MILES NORTHEAST OF NEW York City, the Merritt Parkway passes under a narrow railroad trestle. Several times a day, passenger trains cross this bridge on the single-track, electrified spur line which covers the seven miles between Danton and Cranford, Connecticut.

For a few seconds, a train crossing the trestle is outlined against the sky, clearly visible to the occupants of automobiles on the dual highway below. Few motorists, however, glance up at the bridge under ordinary circumstances.

At 7:45 on the morning of Tuesday, September 12th, the train which had departed from Danton two minutes earlier—made up of nine self-propelled electric cars—rumbled over the bridge, then rounded a curve and slowed to its first stop at Forbush, one of several suburban way stations on the spur line to Cranford, where the train would switch to the main line for its express run to 125th Street and Grand Central Station.

In the head car, which was a club car, with its curtains lowered for privacy, relaxed men were playing

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bridge and backgammon, drinking coffee, and reading the morning newspapers. Many a Danton commuter would do anything, pull any strings, to become a member of this private club on wheels; the waiting list involved a longer wait than that of the most exclusive country clubs in suburban New York or New Jersey.

The second car was a smoker, already crowded with tense commuters awaiting the influx of a still greater crowd at the Forbush station. Behind were seven more of the stainless-steel railroad cars, including a rear-end smoker.

A motorist driving in the eastbound lane of the Merritt Parkway, proceeding up a long hill toward the bridge, might well have noticed the train passing overhead, from left to right, across the face of the sun rising over the crest of the hill ahead. And he might, on this particular Tuesday morning, have seen the figure of a man in hat and topcoat falling out the open door of the train, down the steps between the first and second cars, and onto the concrete highway 35 feet below.

As it happened, the only thing noticed by the motorist most concerned was a streak of dark to his left, and all he felt was the slight shudder of his automobile as it struck a soft object. The driver's name was Quincy Rudd. He had been doing his normal 55 miles per hour and wasn't even aware of the train overhead.

Rudd stopped and looked back. He saw the body in the road and, although shaken, managed to find a telephone booth at a nearby Parkway exit. He told the first police to arrive at the scene that he supposed the victim had leaped off the median strip of the Parkway into the path of the car and had committed suicide.

The body was identified as that of W. John Dunn, 53 years old, a New York corporation executive with a home on Rosebush Lane in Danton. That much was apparent from his Connecticut driver's license and his American Express, University Club, and Racquet and Tennis Club identification cards. Dunn's wallet also contained $115 in bills; photos of a woman who used an expert hairdresser and of two arrogant-looking boys; and a Blue Cross and major medical insurance card, neither of which was of any value to him now.

Among other items, Dunn's pockets also produced the keys to a Mercedes Benz, a solid gold pen and pencil, and a notebook indicating that he had taken quite a number of persons out to lunch recently at rather expensive establishments, each time for clearly detailed business purposes . . .

Chief Dave Harris of the understaffed Danton Police Department received the preliminary report while he was filling in on traffic duty in the business section of the rigidly

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zoned little town. He was making out an overtime parking ticket for a highly irritated citizen who was threatening to mention the matter of Police Department pettiness at the next meeting of the Board of Finance, of which he was proud to be a member. Harris completed writing out the ticket before proceeding with the investigation of Dunn's death.

After a painful interview with the widow, who was at home in a rambling 20-room house on Rosebud Lane, Chief Harris was inclined to report the case as an accidental death. Dunn had been in consistently good health and was not likely therefore to have suffered a dizzy spell; and certainly there was no apparent reason why he should have jumped off the train.

True, the doors of the Danton train were left open on one side all the way from Danton to Cranford—because of the frequent stops for passengers along the way. There was always the danger, of course, that a man walking through the moving train might be thrown out between cars by a sudden lurch. Yes, an accident seemed infinitely more likely than suicide, and since there had not been a murder in Danton in a century and a half, that possibility didn't even enter anyone's mind.

One point, however, nagged at the Chief of Police. Dunn always parked his Mercedes convertible in a particular parking spot close to the head car of the waiting train and always got on at the last minute. He was known as "the last man aboard the Club Car." So it seemed out of character that on the day of his death he would have got aboard near the rear of the train and would have been walking forward through the train when he fell out.

Not being clairvoyant, Chief Harris could hardly know that on the previous day, the 11th, a commonplace incident had occurred in Grand Central Station which fitted into the pattern of Dunn's death. A man in a gray coat stood in line at one of the windows of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Rail Road and purchased a two-day round-trip ticket to Danton. His name was Foster McWithy, his age 51, his home Danton, his occupation comptroller, and his purchase was unusual only because he already possessed a 46-trip commutation ticket between New York and Danton, bearing his signature, which was valid for two more weeks.

That afternoon, along with hundreds of fellow commuters from Danton, McWithy caught his regular train, the 5:09 to Danton. He was too late for a window seat, too late even to get an aisle seat. He had to squeeze in apologetically between two irritated passengers on the three-seat side of the aisle, and he had to submit to the pressure of elbows in his ribs all the way to Cranford.

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When the train reached the end of the spur line at Danton, McWithy got off and unlocked his car in the station parking lot. Instead of driving home, he drove back to Cranford and parked in a place where he could safely leave the car all night. He then waited for the next train back to Danton. Since McWithy's commutation ticket had previously been punched by the conductor on the 5:09, he used the homebound half of the round-trip ticket he had purchased at Grand Central to cover his second trip to Danton that day.

On reaching the end of the line, and since his car was no longer available and he did not want to risk taking a taxi, McWithy walked three miles along country roads to his home. When headlights appeared on the road, he tried to lose himself in the shadows, for he preferred not to be recognized on foot.

McWithy's wife and children were away for the week, visiting her parents in Florida. Aside from fixing his own supper, he had little to occupy his mind that evening other than reviewing the scheme he had been planning for some time.

The next morning, Tuesday, the 12th, McWithy rose earlier than usual and walked to the station; he was bundled up in a dark gray herringbone topcoat and wore a gray felt hat. Taking no chances on being recognized at the newsstand, he carried a copy of the Cranford *Advocate* which had been delivered to his home late the previous afternoon.

Making sure he wasn't seen by any acquaintances, McWithy boarded the 7:43 train three minutes before it was due to depart. Avoiding his usual seat in the fifth car from the front, he mounted the steps between the first car (which was the Club Car) and the second (which was the smoker). With his hat pulled down and the newspaper shielding his face, he stood in a corner of the vestibule, opposite the steps on the open side of the train and just outside the door leading forward into the Club Car.

By now the 7:43 was ready to depart. Nearly all the Danton passengers were aboard, stacking their attaché cases, coats, and hats on the overhead racks, pulling down the shades on the left, or sunny side of the train, and settling with their newspapers into the preferred window seats. In the Club Car the card games had already started.

A couple of late arrivals brushed past McWithy into the Club Car, barely noticing the man reading a newspaper in the corner. McWithy decided that he was safe, that he had not been recognized, and determined to go ahead with his scheme.

Just seconds before 7:43, the man he was waiting for, W. John Dunn, appeared—"the last man aboard the Club Car."

"One minute, John," McWithy said quietly as the latecomer reached for the doorknob.

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"Hello, McWithy," Dunn said sourly, and began to turn the knob.

"Wait, this is important," McWithy took a step forward. "It's a matter of life and death."

Dunn stared at his accoster as the train emitted two toots and started to roll down the tracks in the direction of Cranford.

"Are you drunk?" Dunn asked witheringly.

"Not at all," said McWithy. "This concerns your wife, and—"

"What do you know of my wife?" Dunn snapped, looking at McWithy with distaste. The train was now nearing its first stop at Forbush, just a mile down the track from Danton, to pick up more commuters. The head car reached the narrow trestle over the Merritt Parkway just before the Forbush stop.

"This is what I mean," said McWithy, taking the lapel of Dunn's topcoat.

Dunn, his back to the open steps, pulled away.

At this instant, as the train rumbled over the trestle, McWithy wrenched his victim's grip from the doorknob and pushed. Dunn was thrown backward out the open door.

Seconds later the train rounded a curve and stopped at Forbush. As a group of commuters streamed up the steps into the train, McWithy opened the door into the smoker behind the Club Car, and like the other men just boarding the train, found a seat. The conductor, working his way through the train, punched McWithy's commutation ticket without comment.

Ten minutes later the train made its last suburban stop, at Cranford, before the express run into Manhattan. McWithy and a handful of other passengers got off at Cranford.

McWithy walked to the car he had left in Cranford overnight and drove back to the Danton station. He parked, nodded to an acquaintance, bought a copy of the *Times* and exchanged a word with the news dealer, boarded the 8:28, and stared out the window most of the way into New York. When the conductor came through, McWithy fished in his wallet for his commutation ticket before realizing it had already been punched for that day, the 12th of the month. He found the unused half of the round-trip ticket in his wallet and gave that to the conductor.

McWithy returned home as usual on the 5:09, which had the Club Car hooked on at the rear end. Occupying his regular seat on a forward car, he failed to notice that Chief of Police Harris was waiting at the far end of the platform to question members of the Club Car.

Chief Harris, a sandy-haired man of 35, was inclined to let older men push him around, and he worked for a town which was home to a number of important people who did not hesitate to exert their influence on local affairs. But Harris was a thorough man by nature, and he had decided to make a complete

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investigation before recommending a verdict of accidental death. He saw to it that nobody left the Club Car until he'd had a chance to talk to all the members.

He interviewed them, jotting down occasional notes with a ball point pen in a small spiral notebook. He learned that W. John Dunn had been a conservative type, not likely to have incited or participated in any sort of violence; that he had been in good spirits; and that he was stiff-necked when he chose to be.

For instance, Dunn had blackballed an applicant by the name of Foster McWithy for membership in the Club Car and had been tactless enough to let McWithy know the rejected applicant would never ride in the Club Car as long as Dunn was chairman—or even a member—of the membership committee.

Some of the members considered Dunn to have been rather sharp at the bridge and backgammon games played on the train, although it was out of the question that he would have ever cheated, or caused anyone's financial ruin, or even embarrassment, at gambling.

Two members recalled vaguely having seen a man on the train platform, just outside the Club Car, as the 7:43 started; but they doubted it had been Dunn, whom they would have recognized even with his head behind a newspaper.

Two nights later, still plodding through his investigation, Chief Harris called at McWithy's home. He was offered a highball, which he accepted, before producing his notebook and pen.

"Mr. McWithy," he said, "with regard to Mr. Dunn's unfortunate accident. I wonder if you could provide any helpful information?"

"Afraid not, Chief," said McWithy. "I hardly knew the man. He was rather a cold fish, but it was too bad, just the same."

"They tell me he blackballed you from membership in the Club Car."

"Oh? That's correct, of course. He kept me out for no good reason, no reason at all. I suppose I ought to be glad he's dead at that—now I can get in."

"You resented him, then?"

McWithy laughed. "Come now, Chief, sure I resented him. But not enough to kill him. He committed suicide, is what I hear."

"No," Harris replied, "from the looks of things it appears to have been an accidental death."

"Well, I don't really know anything about it. I wasn't even on that train."

"No?"

"The 7:43 is my regular train, but last Tuesday I overslept and caught the 8:28."

Chief Harris thought a moment, then said, "Some of the passengers seem to recall a man in a gray hat and coat standing in the vestibule of the Club Car, reading a newspaper, just before the train started. If we could get a line on that man, he might be able to tell us something

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about Mr. Dunn—whether he was excited, or preoccupied, or anything out of the ordinary."

"Chief, I can't help you at all. As I say, I was on the 8:28. If you want to check, they might remember me at the newspaper stand in the station. I had to break a ten."

"It's just that I don't like to leave any loose ends. I can check at the newsstand. How about the ticket counter?"

"No good, Chief. I didn't buy a ticket on Tuesday. I have a 46-trip commutation ticket." McWithy took out his wallet and produced a green cardboard ticket, two inches by six, bearing the name of the railroad, the names of the stations, Danton and New York, his signature, and rows of squares, in each of which was a printed number indicating the date of the month.

"As you know," McWithy continued, "the conductor punches out the number on each trip—one number on the bottom row for the trip to New York, and the same number on the row above for the trip back to Danton. The ticket is good for 23 rides per month in each direction."

Chief Harris held out his hand for the ticket and examined it. "I see the 9th and 10th are unpunched; that was last week-end."

"Correct," said McWithy.

"Then you went to New York on the 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th—that's today—and all those numbers have been punched out."

"Correct."

"Mr. McWithy, I notice that some of those punch holes have different shapes. Here's a sort of bell-shaped hole on the 11th; the same on the 12th, 13th, and 14th. But earlier in the month there are several star-shaped holes. Hmm."

Chief Harris studied the ticket. "Do you mind if I take this?" he asked.

McWithy looked irritated. "Of course I mind," he said. "I need that ticket to get to New York tomorrow. It still has more than a week to go."

"Sorry," Harris said, rising and handing the ticket back to McWithy. "I appreciate your assistance."

"No trouble at all, Chief," McWithy said. He showed Harris to the door.

Out on the driveway, Harris stood reflectively by his car for a moment, then made a decision. He returned to the house, entered without knocking, and stepped into the living room.

McWithy was standing over the coffee table on which rested a large glass ashtray. In the ashtray were several torn pieces of green cardboard. McWithy was holding a book of matches in his hand as he turned to face the Chief.

"I seem to have left my pen," said Harris.

"Maybe it dropped behind the

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cushion—you were sitting in that chair. There it is on the floor." McWithy was stammering in confusion. He picked up the pen.

Harris stepped to the coffee table and removed the pieces of green cardboard from the ashtray.

"If you don't want this commutation ticket, I do," he said. "We can fit the pieces together." He took the pen from McWithy, who had slumped into a chair.

"You know that we can find the conductor who uses a bell-shaped punch," Harris said. "I'll give you one hundred to one that he's the conductor now working the 7:43 and that he'll remember punching your ticket on the 12th of this month. You were on that train."

McWithy collected himself. "Chief, I told you I was on the 8:28 that day," he said heatedly. "I have witnesses to prove it—the newsstand dealer, a friend I sat next to on the train, the people in my office—they'll remember I got to work late. What is this? Aren't you going out of your way to harrass an honest taxpayer? This is persecution!"

"Mr. McWithy, you were on the 7:43."

"I couldn't have been on *two* trains."

"Why not? You could have taken the 7:43, got off at one of the way stations, returned to Danton, and then got aboard the 8:28 as if nothing had happened."

"There's no train that would get me back to Danton in time."

"A taxi, then."

"You find a taxi that drove me from Cranford to Danton on Tuesday, and I'll agree you're right."

"So you got off at Cranford. Perhaps you had your car parked there."

"The whole thing is ridiculous," cried McWithy. "The Selectmen of this town will receive a complete report of your libelous accusations. You haven't a shred of evidence to place me on that train."

"Your commutation ticket, Mr McWithy. The bell-shaped hole will prove you were on the 7:43 on the 12th of September. I can think of only one reason why you would want to conceal that fact. Did you push Dunn off the train, or did you kill him first and then throw him out?"

McWithy had the look of a man falling through space with a parachute that won't open.

"Membership in that Club Car must have meant something extra-special to you—to make it worth committing a murder for," Harris said, almost casually.

"I waited ten years for a chance to ride to work like a gentleman." McWithy almost moaned. "For ten years I rode those commuter trains, three hours a day, jammed between obnoxious strangers. The Club Car is different. When you're in the Club Car you *belong*."

"Get your coat," said the Chief of Police. "*You* belong in a nuthouse."

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Before we could publish William Baldwin's "The Last Man Aboard," the author sent in his second story—a curious little tale compared with his "first." We decided to publish Mr. Baldwin's two stories in the same issue, back to back, as we have done only a few times in EQMM's 23 years.

The author's second story, like his "first," is told simply and directly, but (a most encouraging sign!) with a firmer grip on both his plot material and his writing—and with a beautiful closing sentence! It is another story about the town of Danton (in Connecticut?), and this suggests that a series is under way. So be it!—certainly there are enough crime and detection, suspense and sleuthing, in any American suburb to make and sustain an interesting series . . .

THE RING OF A TELEPHONE

by WILLIAM BALDWIN

A REALTOR EXPECTS TO MEET ECcentric people, so perhaps I was slightly disappointed to find nothing out of the way about Mrs. Allen Peabody. But she was a merry little lady with a tinkling laugh, and I enjoyed her company on my first visit to the Peabody house.

When I had finished inspecting the place, we conferred in the living room, where I accepted a sherry to be polite. It was an attractive ten-room Colonial with an artesian well producing twenty gallons a minute, situated on three secluded acres near the outskirts of Danton. I didn't think I would have any trouble selling it.

"How much do you think it is worth?" Mrs. Peabody asked. She was a trim brunette with welkin-blue eyes, neat as a pin, the kind of homemaker with a place for everything and everything in its place.

"You ought to get seventy or seventy-five thousand in this market," I told her. "Possibly eighty if you're willing to wait for the right buyer."

"Mr. Brinker," she said, "I'll be glad to take sixty or sixty-five thousand if you can sell the house quickly."

"It would be a shame to let it go for a sacrifice," I said. "If you leave town, you can put the house in my hands. We often act as agents for absentee owners."

"Thanks, no, Mr. Brinker," she said. "I simply don't want to be bothered by unfinished business. I'm going to Nevada for a divorce, and then I'm going to travel, perhaps take a round-the-world cruise."

Somewhere in another room, I thought I heard a bell ring. "Isn't

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that your telephone?" I asked.

She laughed her tinkly laugh. "No. That is, it's a house phone connected with the garage. It used to be connected with the bomb shelter, too—Mr. Peabody insisted on it. Now the neighbors' children get into our garage and just ring it for fun. I don't pay any attention to it any more, and after a while the children go away."

"I didn't notice your shelter," I said, curiously.

"Of course not, Mr. Brinker. It's sealed up." She made a face, and a little dark cloud seemed to pass over the sunshine in her eyes.

"These days a bomb shelter is a distinct plus in selling a house," I told her. "When you buy a house with a shelter already in, you don't have to apologize to everybody for building it. In this market I'd rate a fallout shelter even ahead of a swimming pool. By the way, where is it? I didn't see any sign of it when we went over the place just now."

"It's locked up and the entrance is covered over. You know, I spent two whole days shoveling dirt into the hole. I have a flower garden there now. For all practical purposes, it doesn't exist."

"I don't understand," I said. "Why did you have it built in the first place?"

"It wasn't my idea. It was Mr. Peabody's. Once an idea gets into his head, it just won't budge out. He simply insisted on building that bomb shelter."

"Your husband built it himself?"

"No, he had it done by a regular contractor. But he spent all his spare time in it—fixing it up with cots, chairs, books, all that stuff. Oxygen tanks. Food. My God, he had enough food and water in there to keep two people alive for six months! And liquor. He would stay in there for entire week-ends. 'A dry run,' he said. Dry! Well, I won't have to listen to him go on about that shelter any more. I can't wait to say goodbye to this place."

"What about your husband?"

"He's gone. He deserted me several weeks ago."

I was shocked. I hadn't thought Mrs. Peabody had a problem in the world. "There may be any number of explanations," I said, hoping I wasn't talking myself out of a sale. "He might very well return."

"No," she said firmly. "He's left me, and I'm going away too—as soon as I can make all the arrangements, like selling this house."

I rose and thanked her for the sherry.

"Amontillado," she said. "Mr. Peabody brought home a case of it. He said it was a rare find. My husband considers himself quite a connoisseur of wines."

Two days later I showed the Peabody house to a couple who fell in love with it and made an offer of $55,000, not daring to hope it would be accepted. But Mrs.

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Peabody accepted the offer without the slightest hesitation.

After the closing, which we rushed through, I drove Mrs. Peabody from our local bank back to the house, where a pile of her suitcases, all packed, stood ready in the front hall. She had put most of her furniture in storage and left the rest of it for the new owners.

Mrs. Peabody declined my offer to drive her to the railroad station and said she would arrange for a taxi.

"Then goodbye, Mrs. Peabody," I said.

"Goodbye, Mr. Brinker, and thanks for all your help." She didn't seem to realize that my commission of nearly $3000 was the easiest I had ever earned.

A house phone on the wall in the kitchen gave a hollow ring. Mrs. Peabody picked up the receiver and listened for a moment. She didn't say anything. After another short pause she hung up.

"Children in the garage again," she said. "I told the new owners I was having these house phones removed. This one must have been overlooked."

She yanked the phone from the wall, then pulled the cord free from its connection, dropping the whole apparatus in a kitchen waste basket.

"Mrs. Peabody," I said, "you're not supposed to do anything like that after the closing. Legally, the house is no longer yours."

"Don't worry about it, Mr. Brinker," she laughed. "I notified them I was having the house phones taken out, and they were perfectly satisfied. Besides, they know they're getting a bargain, so I don't think there will be any complaints."

I never saw Mrs. Peabody again, and of course I had never met her husband. But whenever I sip a sherry—especially Amontillado—I think of them and wonder whatever became of them. Occasionally, when my own telephone rings, I seem to hear in the back of my mind the ring of the Peabody house phone, and I experience an odd sensation in the pit of my stomach. Still, when you come right down to it, the ring of a telephone is a meaningless sound—unless there is someone you know at the other end.

EDITORS' QUERY: *If you were Mr. Brinker, wouldn't you suggest to the police that they excavate and unseal that bomb shelter? After all, there was enough food and water in the shelter to keep two people alive for six months . . . unless all ventilation had been cut off . . . Brrr!*

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**MARK VAN DOREN**
TITLE:	***The Wild Thing***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVES:	The Inspector and Mrs. Eldred
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Another "purely luminous" story by one of America's best-known poets and teachers; and this story is "different"—indeed, it is remarkable not only for what it says, but even more for what it doesn't say . . .*

THE INSPECTOR DROVE SLOWLY through the park, stopping longer at each red light than he needed to. He wanted to make sure that Mrs. Eldred understood why he was so bent on getting a confession out of Anderville before things went any further—before, he meant, the D.A. handed up an indictment for murder in the first degree.

"In my opinion," the Inspector said, "there isn't enough evidence to convict him, and there never will be. He left no traces in her room that we can find, and we've been over it with microscopes. So far as we can tell he didn't even touch the baby. If he went there at all, his purpose must have been to *take* the baby. The mother of an infant girl kidnaps the child from the father, and the father rushes to reclaim his little piece of meat. Delete the last four words"—for Mrs. Eldred had caught her breath —"and substitute 'his offspring.' Forgive me. I'm desperate. I relapsed."

"Do policemen think like that when nobody's listening?"

"Policemen don't think. They

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only sniff and snoop, and write things down."

He slipped a small black notebook out of his pocket and slapped it lightly with the back of his hand, then put it away again.

"And come to see their friends," Mrs. Eldred added.

"If they have any. I have you and John—and by the way, Mrs. Eldred, I hope you know how much I appreciate that. The two of you have helped me—saved me—many times."

"John has, I know."

"And you. He swears by you, and so do I. But in this case there was the special reason that Anderville said he knew you."

"Yes, of course. But that is so queer, Inspector. His name means nothing to me; I never heard it before; and how could he have heard mine?"

"Didn't I tell you? He caught my eye as I was saying to one of the detectives that Professor Eldred might be interested in this story, and he called out across the room, 'John Eldred? At the university? I know his wife, or used to.' I didn't believe it, and told him so, thinking he would say more; but he turned back into himself and hid there as he's been doing from the start; said he hadn't meant to bring you into it, and was sorry he did. I can hardly doubt that he thinks he knows you. Queer, as you say. I certainly don't understand."

"Anderville. There's something about that name. But I know I never heard it."

"Who has, till now?"

"There's *something*." But she changed the subject. "His wife—what kind of room was it?"

"Terrible. She had rented it the day before, and I've never seen worse furniture. Two of the bed's feet—the ones next to the wall—were propped up with old telephone books, which in turn covered holes you could put your arm into—we did, and there were rat's nests. She told the landlady her husband had gone to sea—suddenly been called back to his ship—but it would be only a short voyage, and then they were leaving town. It was a short voyage for her."

"Is he a seaman?"

"Not so far as we know. She was a wild thing—would have made up any kind of yarn."

"A wild thing? But you saw her only after—"

"Yes. A single knife wound, in the very center of her heart. Surgical precision, we were tempted to say. Of course, whoever did it might simply have been lucky. And he was smart enough not to leave the knife."

"Whoever did it. You think he didn't?"

"I think he did. The D.A. is right about the motive—Anderville had a very powerful one, and the prosecutor will be wise to dwell on it. You wondered what I meant by wild. Well, even on top of the

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terror she must have felt when she saw it coming, there was something in her face—in her eyes, till I closed them—that I'd call primitive. I've seen many such faces, as you know; but this one could have given him a hard time from 'way back at the beginning. He won't talk about her, but I wonder why he ever married someone like that. Someone he couldn't live with, and left for cause—to save the baby, he said once, and I can believe it. Then she comes and steals the little object."

"And *he* leaves it in that room."

"Where it cried until other people on the floor heard it and broke in. Yes, Mrs. Eldred, it's a strange case, and you haven't heard all of it by a long shot. My idea, roughly, is to let him tell you the rest—if he will talk. If he won't, it will be the first time you ever failed to find out more than I could. I thought of you even before he said what he did. I told you, I mentioned John's name, but I had you in mind. I hope John didn't object to my snatching you off on such short notice."

"No"—slowly—"I think not. Both of us couldn't have come and left the boys alone."

"I realized that, Mrs. Eldred."

He will never call me Sally, she decided; nor will I ask him to. Even Sarah—no, he never will.

"You think he did it," she said, "and you want him to confess. For legal reasons? Because he couldn't be convicted on the evidence? And yet he might; in which case it would have been better for him to gamble on the lighter sentence—is that it?"

The Inspector thought a while. "I suppose that's it."

"I see. You're interested in *him*."

He thought again. "I am, Mrs. Eldred. And when you see him you'll know why. You'll agree, I think, it might be good for him to confess. He needs to, and really wants to, only—" The Inspector, embarrassed, did not finish.

"His motive, now," said Sally in a tone she hoped was dry; she must appear to have noticed nothing. "You seem to be—what shall I say? —in sympathy with that. Or with his motives, running back over several years. You hint of a history. And you say, 'for cause.' Was there another man at one time?"

"Pretty certainly not. She was the jealous one—for no cause, he insists. Yet he won't go into this, beyond suggesting that her jealousy was the wildest thing about her. Totally baseless, totally unmanageable."

"I hope I can keep all of it straight. Somehow I don't feel adequate."

"You are, Mrs. Eldred, I'm betting on that. Incidentally, another woman is seeing him tomorrow—at her request, not his. I'm afraid she won't get anywhere with him. He refused at first, then said she could come. He may still refuse."

"Should I know about her? Was she one of the reasons, right or

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wrong, for the jealousy you describe?"

"God, no! I mean that literally, Mrs. Eldred. She's a nun."

"Oh!"

"Oh is correct. Somehow they both knew Sister Joseph Rose—funny name, but you never can tell about these orders—or Sister Joe knew *them*, and used to help them all she could. She teaches in a school down the block from where they originally lived. I can imagine how it started: she saw them one day on the sidewalk, when he was carrying the kid, and she stopped to admire it; or maybe the child was sick, and they were looking for a doctor; something like that. She thinks she can help him now, but I doubt it. She's another subject he won't discuss."

They had come to Headquarters, and the Inspector was parking his car in a space reserved for it not far beyond the street entrance.

"Now," he said, "we'll go in. You can wait in my office while I go see what calls there have been. When I join you I'll have Anderville with me. Why, there's Sister Joe!"

The revolving door had delivered to his gaze a tall figure in flowing black and white—a figure that stood there, troubled and uncertain, waiting for him to ascend the steps. She was alone, contrary to the custom of her kind.

"Why, Sister! You were due tomorrow, not today."

"I know. But we are having a visitation; I won't be free tomorrow. So I came now, when I could. I suppose I shouldn't have; he refused to see me. I'm so sorry, Inspector."

She is beautiful, thought Sally; I never saw a nun so beautiful. Or at this moment, anyway, so sad. What a fair skin, and what fine eyes. I wonder what her hair is like—was like.

"Excuse me," said the Inspector. "Sister Joseph Rose, this is my friend, Mrs. Eldred."

The two women shook hands, and the nun's smile, Sally said to herself, was wonderful to see. So was her hand—soft, yet strong. For just this moment Sister Joseph Rose seemed to have no troubles. Then they returned.

"I hope he will see me yet," she said to the Inspector. "If he wants to, if he changes his mind, will you let me know? I'll come any time, except tomorrow."

"Of course." He didn't sound confident, though he tried to.

"Are *you* seeing him, Mrs. Eldred?"

Sally hesitated. How could she be sure she was? And even so, wouldn't it be putting her above this lovely person who had failed?

"She is," said the Inspector. "It's arranged. He claims he used to know her."

"Oh. Well, then—Mrs. Eldred, you will have my prayers. As I go down the street I'll pray that he may listen. And talk. It would be

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so good for him to talk—to you if not to me." She added, as if irrelevantly, "He used to know *me*. They both did; the baby did." There was not a trace of envy in her voice. "The baby, Inspector—they told me in there that she is well cared for at St. Barbara's—sleeps, eats, and hardly ever cries."

"I believe that is right," said the Inspector; and they left her.

"She's so beautiful," said Sally.

"What's that?" the Inspector was a pace ahead. "Why, yes, she is. A waste, you think?"

"No."

"Hm." He was studying a bulletin board. "All right, we'll go up now and I'll leave you for—I promise—no longer than ten minutes."

"I can wait. I need to."

"Don't be nervous."

"No."

But she was, sitting by his empty desk—he never left anything on it—then standing up, then sitting down again and turning, slowly, the gold band on her finger. It was a trifle big for her, but she had never taken it off to be made smaller.

When a door opened behind her she fairly jumped to her feet and whirled about. There they both were.

"I should have knocked," said the Inspector. "My own office, but I should have knocked."

A young man, head and shoulders taller than the Inspector, looked over him at Sally, then looked away toward the window. He was good-looking in a ravaged way: blond, brown-eyed, very poorly dressed, and his hands would not keep still at his sides. They seemed to be searching the air for some stray object to hold on to.

"Well, Rex, sit down. You too, Mrs. Eldred." The Inspector went to the oak chair behind his desk. "Now the first thing is for Mrs. Eldred to find out what you meant when you told me—"

"Rex." She repeated the name, only half aloud. "Rex." It didn't seem to work. "Rex Anderville."

"I'm your cousin," he said.

She got up as if her name had been called, though it hadn't, and stared at him. The Inspector, startled, watched them both.

"And that is not my name, not exactly, not as it was when you knew me, when we were children. I'm Ralph Anderson, your second cousin. Remember? We lived at Boonville, and you came to visit us sometimes. Not often, but you came. Don't you remember?"

Her eyes went over his face, doing their best to bring back whatever it was she had forgotten—if she *had* forgotten, if he wasn't making all this up.

"Ralph Anderson," he said again, adding with what seemed to be a terrible difficulty, an all but insurmountable reluctance, "My father was your Uncle Cliff, and my mother"—this seemed harder yet—"was your Aunt Cleo."

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"Oh!" she said, and sat down without removing her eyes from his. "Those names—yes. And yours. But you changed it. Anderson and Boonville: Anderville. And Rex to Ralph. You changed everything—why?"

She was remembering at last. Uncle Cliff and Aunt Cleo: long ago those names had ceased to be spoken in the family. All at once, when she was still a child, they became dead names. And she, without even knowing that she did so, had forgotten. Her own father and mother never explained. Of course, she thought, they couldn't, or they would have.

The silence was broken by the Inspector. "Then there's something to it, Mrs. Eldred?"

"Yes"—still puzzled—"yes, there is. He can't be inventing this."

"Thank you, Sally." She blinked at the prisoner. "See?" he said, "I know your name. I've kept track, too, off and on. I read about it in the papers when you married the professor."

To think, she said to herself—all this time, and I never gave him one thought, never wondered. But then how could I have? Dead names, and for all I knew, dead people.

"I want you to understand," said Ralph, "that I didn't mean to get you into this. *He* mentioned the name Eldred, and before I knew it—"

"Oh"—faintly—"I'm glad you did. So you *are* my cousin. I didn't have very many; we didn't."

"No. And I saw to it that you wouldn't have *me*. I ran away when I was twelve, from the neighbor family that took me in, and later on I changed my name. You never knew what happened, did you, to make me do this? Maybe I shouldn't tell you. Maybe I should go upstairs now. The last thing I want to bother you with is my"—he searched for a word and found the weakest one—"problem. It can't make any difference to you."

Yet he didn't turn away, and if he looked at the Inspector it wasn't to suggest that someone be sent for to remove him.

What he did suggest, or seem to, the Inspector acted on at once. "Listen, you two," he said. "There's something I must attend to. Why can't you make yourselves comfortable here for—well, say half an hour? Mrs. Eldred, you need feel no—er—responsibility; the corridor is jammed with guards. What do you say, kinfolk?"

He took their silence for consent and left them, whistling to himself, as if his mind were already elsewhere, while he closed the door behind him.

They looked at each other a long time before she said, in the quietest voice of which she was capable, "You say a neighbor family took you in. Had you been left alone?"

He seemed as stricken as if it had happened yesterday. "My father simply disappeared—deserted us—we couldn't guess why, or I

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couldn't, and he was never heard of again. I don't even know if he's still alive. We never had had much money, and now there was no prospect of any. My mother wasn't even a good housekeeper; never had been; I remember quarrels about that. So what could she do? What *did* she do? You never heard?"

"No. And you don't have to tell me."

"I didn't know myself till I was old enough to understand, years after I ran away." He waited. "*She* deserted *me;* and turned up in a"—he stopped, as if there were no word for it.

"In a what, Ralph? Now that you've started—"

"In a *house.*" The emphasis was dreadful. "She ran it. She was the madam."

What could anybody say? It was as if a death had just occurred in plain sight. Yet she thought of something.

"But you didn't know about this. How old were you when she left you?"

"Nine. The neighbor family was good to me, yet they couldn't help treating me like a cat or a dog they had found at the back door, starving. Or so I felt, and maybe I was unfair. But anyway, I decided to go it alone. I was tall for my age and—well, I kept alive. I got jobs picking berries, mowing lawns, shoveling snow, and between times I begged; I even stole—only to eat, though, only to keep traveling. Then I reached here, and I was strong enough now to get a job and keep it—handling crates and barrels in a cold-storage plant. It's still my job, or was till—"

"Yes," she said. "And you got married."

He nodded, a dull pain clouding his otherwise expressionless eyes. "Lucille waited on the counter where I ate. She was older than me, and I guess it was her idea. To begin with, at least, it wasn't mine. I never even thought of it. Then I began to notice how she wouldn't ever let the other women in the diner bring me my sandwiches and coffee; she always got there first; and I was proud of this, I was monkey enough to think it meant something about me. What it meant, though, was something about Lucille. She never changed; and after we got married it was worse—she was jealous of everything and everybody. So I wasn't proud any more. It made me sick, I tell you, it made me sick."

His voice rose, intentionally or not. "Then last year she had a baby. At first I supposed this might make a difference—give her something solid to think about. It didn't. You won't believe this, but there was somebody that got interested in us, and came several afternoons a week and helped. A woman." He considered a moment, pondering perhaps the degrees of the incredible. "A nun."

"Sister Joseph Rose."

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He stiffened. "That smart cop. He told you."

"I met her as she was leaving. You wouldn't see her."

"No! I was afraid I would get excited and tell her!" He was excited already. "And she mustn't know. Understand? She mustn't."

He went to the window and looked out, right, left, almost as if he thought *she* might be there.

"Sister Joe," he said without turning around. "It was all about her—all the bad part. Would you believe it, Lucille got jealous of *her;* hated her; tried to keep her from coming. And when I said she was crazy even to think such a thing, she said she would show me. The baby was the reason the Sister came. Lucille was no good as a mother, and Sister—well, she could have been one. I appreciated this; I liked to have her there; I *loved* her—and you know what I mean. But Lucille didn't, and she treated her like a tramp. And one day she nearly told her why. That scared me; so after Sister Joe was gone I got so mad I said to Lucille, 'Listen! If you ever do say it I'll kill you.' Of course"—hastily, almost guiltily—"I didn't mean that." Sally nodded. "'Say what?' she said. 'You know.' 'All I know,' she said, 'is that she wouldn't be sticking that face of hers in here if it wasn't for *this*.' And she slapped Rebecca—that's the baby—so hard she cried. I knew then what she might do some day if nothing stopped her. So one night when she was at the movies I walked out and took Rebecca. Lucille was nuts about Westerns."

"Poor Lucille."

He turned slowly, thinking before he spoke. "Yes, that's right." Her two words, she thought, had ever so gently stung him. "She couldn't help it."

"Did you ever like her? Love her?"

He was almost startled, yet again he took his time. "I guess I did. Yes, I must have. But it seems so long ago."

"Will you miss her?"

"Look here! Why are you asking me things like that?"

"I mean, Ralph, are you sorry?"

At once he was on his guard. "Sorry for what? Say, who are *you*—besides my cousin?"

"Nobody but your cousin. So Lucille found out where you had taken the baby, and she came there and got her. She must have had *some* feeling for her, apart from anything else, any*body* else. You. Sister Joseph Rose. She must have wanted Rebecca for herself."

"Now I don't know about that. She was jealous of me on account of—well, Rebecca liked me best."

"Poor Lucille. She was all alone."

"She didn't have to be." It seemed terribly important to him that this should be clear. Then, when Sally didn't argue the point, he broke his own defenses down. "Sure. She was all alone." His face worked, and without lifting his

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hands to cover it he began to cry. "Sure. I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what, Ralph?" When he didn't seem to hear, she said again, "Sorry, Ralph? For what?"

"For what happened to her." A censor in him controlled his face, his tears. "Somebody went there and—you know!"

"Somebody? But who knew where she was?"

"I didn't."

"She hadn't known where *you* went, either. But she found out. She must have cared more than you did."

"No! I tell you, she didn't!"

"Then *you* found out, *you* went—"

"No, no! I didn't!"

"How could there have been a knife there, one long enough and sharp enough to—"

"*She* had it!" He seemed to know he shouldn't say this, but he did. "*She* had the knife. And when I went to pick Rebecca up she pulled it on me." Now he did cover his face. "But it wasn't just that; I was quicker than she was, and stronger, and pretty soon I had it in—this hand."

He lowered his right one and held it, palm up, for her to see how empty, how innocent it was. "It wasn't just the knife. It was what she said about Sister. She was going to the school and tell Sister Joe before all the others—" He stopped.

"What?"

"Why, that—no, I can't say it."

"Yes, you can. It will be good for you to say it. It will help you. It will prove—"

"Prove nothing!" He was suspicious again. "You talk like a cop, a woman cop."

"The last thing I am, Ralph."

"I don't know about that. But what do you mean, prove? To the law? I don't want the law to be bothering Sister. They'd call her in—they'd tell her—she would die."

"You think so? She looked strong to me. She *felt* strong."

"I tell you, she would die. Then I would have killed two women."

He looked at her hard, as if daring her to understand this.

She only said, "When the Inspector comes in—"

"No! Not him!"

"He likes you, Ralph. He wants you to do whatever is best for you."

"He wants to send me up."

"Maybe—for a little while."

"He wants to burn me."

"No."

"Then what would happen to Rebecca?"

"What's happening to her now? She's well cared for. Sister said so."

"Sister!" he said, intense again. "She *mustn't* find out."

"She may not need to. If there was a struggle over the knife—I don't know. But you can trust her to be strong. Nuns have heard everything. Anyway, Ralph, it's more than a matter of how other people take it. How will *you* take—not telling? How will Lucille?"

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"Lucille!" He edged away from her.

"She deserves the truth about how she lost her life. And so do you, the only person who was there. Rebecca too, of course—why did you leave her in that room?"

"I only thought: What happened, what did I do? I—I tried to bring Lucille back; and when I couldn't, that seemed to be all. I forgot everything but her. Then later—well, I couldn't go back there again."

"It will always be this way, it will be worse, unless you tell. And you *have* told *me*. Are you sorry you did?"

"No, I feel better."

"Not that I will repeat what you said. Do you understand that I won't?"

"Not even to him?" He was silent a moment. "I guess I don't care."

"Not even to him. It's between you two."

He shivered, trying not to show it but failing.

"And when you have told the Inspector, Lucille will be less alone."

He looked at her, haggard yet content. "All right."

There was a tap on the door, and she went to open it. The Inspector walked in without a word.

"Inspector"—she didn't lower her voice—"Ralph has something to tell you."

"Yes?" The Inspector, about to go behind his desk, stopped where he was, alert, and looked at them both.

"May I go now?" she asked.

The Inspector pushed a button; they heard a buzz in the adjoining room. "Yes, m'am you may." He pushed another button. "I'll have Sergeant Edelman see you out, m'am."

"Oh, I can find the way."

"Not in my building. I'll give you and John a ring tonight. Thank you, Mrs. Eldred."

The sergeant came almost at once, and Sally left; but not before she did something else she had not intended to do. She crossed the room suddenly, seeing how pale Ralph was, lifted his hands to her face, and kissed them.

"Do you want me to come and see you when I can? I will, as often as they'll let me—unless you want to be alone."

"I don't want to be alone."

"I'm glad of that. I'm glad of everything."

"So am I."

But now there was the sergeant, and she didn't keep him waiting.

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**ANDREW GARVE**
TITLE:	***Who Would Steal a Mail Box?***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Inspector Knowles
LOCALE:	South Sussex, England
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Who in the world would steal a mail box? And for heaven's sake, why? An intriguing case to which the C.I.D. Inspector applied the strictest and most logical deduction . . .*

ONE BITTER SUNDAY MORNING IN March an unusual problem was put before Inspector Knowles of the South Sussex C.I.D. It seemed that a man named Simpson, who lived in a deeply rural part of the county, had telephoned the police to report that a public mail box near his home had been stolen.

Investigation by the local constable had confirmed the report. The hoops of iron which had clamped the small red box to a telegraph pole had been cut through with a hacksaw. The frozen ground had taken no footprints, and no material clues had been left behind.

The box, which had been cleared at 8:30 Saturday morning, had obviously been stolen Saturday night, since no one would have risked such an operation in daylight; but at night, in that particular place, it would have been comparatively safe. The site was a T-junction of minor lanes, called May's End, and the nearest house—Simpson's—was a hundred yards away, hidden behind trees. Neither Simpson, nor anyone else in the neighborhood, had noticed anything unusual during the night.

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Inspector Knowles didn't seem unduly worried by the lack of clues. "As there's nothing solid to go on," he said, "we'll try a little speculation."

Sergeant Davey nodded and waited.

"Let's assume," Knowles went on, "that the box was taken for a good, practical reason—for something inside it . . . Well, now, I can't see anyone stealing that box simply on the off chance of finding money in it. It isn't used enough. The prospects wouldn't have justified a casual effort—especially on a night as freezing as last night . . ."

Davey nodded again.

"So we'll say," Knowles continued, "that the thief wanted a special letter—which he could only get by taking the box away and breaking it open. Either someone else's letter, or one he'd posted himself."

The Inspector pondered. "One can imagine circumstances . . . For instance, if you knew someone had posted a letter giving harmful information about you to a third party, you might try to intercept it. But *would* you know? He'd hardly tell you . . . No, it seems more likely the thief was trying to recover a letter he'd posted himself."

"Changed his mind about it, you mean, sir?" Davey suggested.

"That's right, Sergeant. It isn't hard to think of reasons. For example, he might have posted a letter earlier in the day confessing to something, or accusing someone of something, and then he might have received unexpected news. Of a death, say. In the papers, or on the radio, or by telephone. News that altered the whole situation. There are endless possibilities—we're certainly not lacking in possible motives . . ."

"We're short of a line on the fellow who did it," Davey said. "Seems to me it could have been anyone. Some passing motorist who went back afterwards . . ."

Knowles considered. "It's possible—but not likely. Those lanes are used almost exclusively by local residents—they aren't a through route. And any stranger approaching May's End in a car would have passed other boxes—so why delay? This must have been a very important letter—and if you go out with an important letter, you don't drift about with it—you post it at once. Yes, I'd say it was definitely a local man."

"That still leaves the field pretty wide open, sir."

"Well, does it really? Remember, Sergeant, that raw wind yesterday. It was the sort of weather that makes sensible people want to hibernate. So the chances are that anyone who posted a letter in the May's End box was posting it in the *nearest* box, and getting back to the warmth of his house as soon as possible. And it shouldn't be hard to find out which houses that box was the nearest to . . ."

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Knowles unfolded a six-inch ordnance map of the area, on which all buildings were marked. Then he talked on the telephone to the police station covering the district, making crosses on the map to indicate the other mail boxes.

"There we are," he said at last. "There are only twenty houses that are nearer the stolen box than any other box. Come on, Sergeant, let's go and see if we can narrow the field a bit."

As Inspector Knowles had foreseen, most of the occupants were quickly eliminated. Many were elderly retired folk, patently incapable of sawing off a heavy post box on a freezing night. Others produced equally convincing evidence that they couldn't have done it. In the end Inspector Knowles was left with only four "possibles."

The first was a retired but vigorous-looking Colonel named Hatherley, who lived with his wife. They said they hadn't heard about the theft, which they both thought outrageous. They hadn't posted any letters in the May's End box themselves—indeed, they had stayed indoors the entire week-end.

The second "possible" was a young man named Forbes, who worked as a draftsman in the neighboring town of Lambridge. He and his fiancée, who were soon to be married, had recently bought a modest cottage about two hundred yards from May's End, and he was taking time off to do some redecorating while his girl visited friends in Cheshire. Like the Colonel, he said the theft of the box was news to him. Asked if he'd posted any letters during the week-end, he said he'd sent one off to his fiancée that morning, Sunday, but none on Saturday.

The third "possible" was a middle-aged solicitor named Hargreaves, a bachelor, who lived in London and came to the country only for an occasional week-end. He had been in the house alone, he said, since Friday night, working. He had heard from his neighbor, Simpson, about the theft. Yes, he had posted three letters in the box on Saturday, one containing an important document. The theft of the mail box was a disgraceful business, and he hoped the police would soon apprehend the culprit.

Finally, there was a small-scale farmer named Angel, who seemed to resent the Inspector's questions. He hadn't heard about the theft, he said, and he didn't know anything about it. He hadn't posted any letters over the week-end, and he hadn't been out on Saturday night.

Knowles returned to his office in a pensive mood. He had a nagging feeling that someone had told him a lie—but try as hard as he could, he couldn't put his finger on it.

There were no developments for three days. Then came a thoroughly unexpected one.

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Hargreaves, the solicitor, rang Knowles from London to say that all three of the letters he'd posted had been delivered. Subsequent inquiries by the Inspector revealed that of nine letters admittedly posted during the week-end by the occupants of the twenty houses, all—every single one of them—had reached their destinations. And not one of them had been tampered with. They had been postmarked in Lambridge late on Tuesday afternoon.

Knowles checked again with his four "suspects." The Colonel said he had been in Lambridge on Tuesday afternoon to get his hair cut. Forbes said he had gone in after lunch to buy some more paint for his decorating. The solicitor said he'd spent all Tuesday seeing a client in the next county. The farmer said he hadn't been in Lambridge at all.

"Well," Knowles commented, "we're sure now that the thief didn't steal the box for any letter or letters but his own. Also, that he has a bit of a conscience—he could easily have destroyed them all. Posting the others certainly added to his danger . . ."

The Inspector continued to mull over the intriguing case, but without making any progress. It wasn't until Thursday morning, when he was working on something else, that he suddenly exclaimed, "Sergeant, I'm a dolt . . . *Of course!* Come on, we're going visiting."

Forbes was still at his cottage, whistling cheerfully as he painted a door. His whistling stopped abruptly when the two policemen appeared.

"Mr. Forbes," Knowles said, "if I remember rightly you told me you hadn't heard about the theft of that post box until I came here on Sunday afternoon."

"That's right, Inspector."

"You also told me you posted a letter to your fiancée on Sunday morning."

"Yes."

"Where did you post it?"

Forbes stared. "I—I posted it in the box on the main road."

"Why not in the box at May's End? It's only two hundred yards from here. The main road is nearly a mile."

"Well, I—I don't really know . . ."

"I suggest," Knowles said, "that you went to the main road because *you knew the May's End box wasn't there!* Because you'd already removed it . . . Mind if I have a look round?"

"Go ahead," the young man said tonelessly. With a gloomy face he accompanied the policemen.

There was nothing in the house to justify suspicion, and nothing in the sheds. Knowles went into the back garden. The ground was iron-hard—nothing could have been buried . . . Then his glance fell on a small pond. Near the center was a disturbed patch where the

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ice had been broken . . . Knowles looked significantly at the Sergeant.

At that point Forbes gave up. "Okay, Inspector," he said. "The box is there—in the pond."

"I was supposed to be getting married at the end of this month," Forbes said, when they were back in the house. "My fiancée, Barbara, and I—well, we hadn't had what you'd call a smooth courtship, but at last everything seemed to be going fine. I was very happy. You see, I'm—I'm very much in love with her . . .

"Then, last Friday, a quarrel suddenly blew up. It was stupid, but we both got very angry . . . I came down here alone, still in a boiling rage, and instead of giving myself time to cool off, I wrote her a furious letter, a real stinker, and posted it . . .

"I'd no sooner shoved it in the box than I regretted it. It was the sort of letter I didn't think she could ever forgive—and I realized what a fool I'd been . . . As the day wore on, I got more and more desperate thinking about it. I'd have sent her a wire asking her not to open the letter, but I wasn't sure she'd get the wire in time . . .

"So I thought, what the hell, my whole future's at stake in this—and that night I went to May's End and pinched the box. I had an awful job breaking it open, but I managed it, and destroyed the letter. On Sunday morning I wrote to Barbara, saying I was sorry and making things up—and on Tuesday I posted the other letters I'd taken from the box. I hoped that would be the end of it . . ."

Knowles picked up a photograph from the table. "Is this your fiancée?"

Forbes nodded.

The Inspector studied it for a moment. The lovely face was piquant, alive, full of intelligence.

"Charming," Knowles said—and paused. "Well, Mr. Forbes, I'm afraid you'll have to come along with me. Stealing Post Office property is a serious offense . . . though, strictly between ourselves, I wouldn't be surprised if the court decided to take a lenient view in the circumstances . . ."

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THE BLIZZARD MURDER CASE

by PHILIP WYLIE

(*Continued from page 35*)

"It's a pretty tough spot," Jack Raymond said. His ordinarily affable face was furrowed with anxiety. "Why in hell didn't you look out the front window?"

Tony Andrews grunted. He shifted his weight on the laced steel straps that formed the bed in his cell in the Tombs. "Who in hell would look for people hanging on the front of a building in a blizzard?"

Raymond nodded. "All right. All right. Didn't they see you go to the door and try to get out in order to call the police?"

"They got there later than that." Tony shook his head like a prize-fighter trying to clear away the effect of too many blows. "I'd like to know what those fellows think I killed Dave for! Of course, I had a row with him. And a violent one. We'd had dozens. Miss Abbott, Dave's secretary, told the cops I called Dave a 'wall-eyed baboon' and a 'chiseling screwball'! But those aren't terms you address to a man you're thinking of murdering."

The lawyer leaned forward, gripped Tony's shoulder, and shook him gently. "You haven't got a lawyer for nothing, Tony. In the first place, they'll never be able to pin it on you while Boyd is missing. In the second place, when they do find Boyd they'll probably find their answer. Moreover, I may be able to change the charge against you and bail you out. I may be able to get a habeas corpus. The Commissioner is an old friend of mine and so is the District Attorney. There are a dozen ways out of this."

Tony nodded more calmly. "What about Miss Jones?"

"They were still talking to her when I came over here."

"Bail her out," Tony said.

Raymond looked thoughtfully at his friend. "Sure. I thought you'd want that."

He started toward the door. Tony caught his arm. "I'll tell you one thing you might try right now. If Les actually did kill Dave it might have been about money. Nobody knew just how Les stood, or what he spent. You might get a couple of certified public accountants to check over all our books—just as a—well—"

Jack nodded slowly. "All right, Tony. Good. I'll put them on immediately."

They had arrested Tony on Thursday morning. On Friday he was still in jail. The police inspector came to see him and talked to him for several hours.

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On Saturday the Commissioner came. Tony knew him slightly, but acquaintanceship did not make their interview a friendly one. Tony went over his story once again, but wrathfully. He swore with fervor that as soon as his name was cleared he would sue every officer in New York. The Commissioner was at first sympathetic but finally cold and withdrawn.

On Saturday, Jack Raymond called for the third time. He reported that accountants, working through the night, had found no trace of theft or embezzlement from the firm. All his schemes for liberating Tony had collapsed. He agreed to move his office temporarily into Tony's on Monday to take charge of the neglected affairs of Cole, Boyd & Andrews.

By Sunday afternoon Tony was in a state of high jitters. When a guard came by and said that Miss Raymond wanted to see him, he welcomed Loretta feverishly. She kissed him. She talked such voluble mush that the guard sheepishly walked out of earshot. Then she told Tony that her father was still working desperately, that she believed him innocent, that she wanted to marry him the minute he got out, and that he shouldn't take it so hard.

"You know," she said, "you're just wearing yourself out foolishly. Everybody's convinced that your story is true. The police seem to wish they hadn't been so hasty about arresting you. Father even seems to think it's a little bit funny that you were put in the cooler. You know you were awfully sure of yourself, Tony. This will be a good lesson to you."

Such statements might have angered another man, but, oddly enough, they served to calm him. For three days he had been acting like a trapped tiger—pacing his cell, refusing his food, and doing very little thinking.

When Loretta had kissed him again and departed, Tony walked to the barred window of his cell and glared at the bitter blue sky. He had been behaving like a school kid. It was time to quit.

After a long period of quiet thinking Tony walked to the door of his cell and called the guard. He handed him a ten-dollar bill. "I want you to see if you can get hold of Miss Wanda Jones—that is, Miss Temple—and have her come here as soon as possible."

He gave the guard Wanda's telephone number in Woodmere.

It wasn't quite regular, but ten dollars was ten dollars and the guard knew where he could reach a colleague who was off duty and could telephone.

Tony didn't have to receive visitors in the steel-barred room with the little wickets for talking, as did the other prisoners. It was a privilege his prominence allowed him. When they brought Wanda to his cell it was almost dark. Her

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cheeks were very red but that was due to the cold. Her smile was pale.

The policeman stood outside for this interview, acting on orders he had received the minute Tony's new visitor announced her name.

Wanda sat down and said, "I wanted terribly to see you, Mr. Andrews, but I was afraid that my coming here would only make things worse for you."

Tony nodded and glanced at the listening policeman. "I'm glad you decided to come." He said that to cover the bribe to the guard, and for a moment she almost gave the guard away by saying that she had been summoned. But in another moment she understood.

Her reply was composed. "I thought that there might be things you want done in the office tomorrow."

She had a mind, Tony thought. "Quite right. There are a lot of things that you've got to take care of for me and others you've got to explain to Jack Raymond. He's going to take over at the office until I get out."

He watched the policeman as he ticked off twenty or more business details—details that included the names of all his partners, sums of money, cities, corporations, bond prices, and other data. In the midst of his recitation he included the statement he had summoned Wanda to hear.

He had just said, "You will find in David Cole's desk, no doubt, the complete mineralogical reports on A. T. B. and J."

A. T. B. and J. meant nothing to Wanda, so that she was doubly alert to what he said next: "In Mr. Boyd's armoire the residuary habiliments will give me an index of the direction he intended to take in that line."

Wanda's eyes flickered for a second. What Tony had conveyed was that the clothes remaining in Leslie's Boyd's room at the hotel, would, by revealing what he had packed in his two suitcases, show more or less where he had intended to go on the fateful night.

Wanda said, "I'll check that up."

The policeman had not noticed anything unusual. The use of such words as "residuary" and "index" had a financial sound. It was, he reported to his superior later, simply a business conversation.

On the following day Tony waited impatiently for Wanda. He was filled with a new hope, because now he was doing something to help himself. He had discovered what he thought might be a new line of investigation. He had discovered it by thinking about Les Boyd.

It was not like that debonair, gay little man to run out on danger unless he had an impressive reason for doing so. There might have been such a reason. Nobody could tell how much Les had known about the murder, and he might have been following the killer of David Cole or tracking down a clue to his murder.

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Les had obviously started on the train to Montreal, but nobody could prove how long he had stayed on that train. Certainly he had no business in Canada so far as Tony knew. Quite possibly he had used the Canadian train as a blind to make some other journey.

Nobody had actually seen him on the train. He had presented his tickets from a curtained berth and he might easily have left the train near New York, come back into town, and taken another. Thus, he could have traveled South, or flown South. That was why Tony wanted to know what clothes were left in his hotel apartment.

If Les had been intending to go to Montreal he would have provided himself with clothing for a cold climate. But if he had been going South his two suitcases would have contained a different kind of clothing.

Wanda came during her lunch hour. She looked excited, so Tony knew that his idea had brought some sort of result. They had expected to be forced to use the same deceptive methods by which he had asked her to make the search, but this time the guard allowed them privacy.

Wanda broke her recitation of business facts the moment the guard was out of earshot. "I didn't dare go to the hotel to ask about the clothes, of course. But I know a newspaper reporter quite well. He got a copy of the complete list of the contents of Mr. Boyd's apartment which the police made the day after the murder. Mr. Andrews! He didn't take *any winter clothes at all!* But a lot of his summer things that I can remember were missing—that light greenish suit and that powder-blue sport coat. And they didn't find his Panama hat in his room."

Her voice was low, almost a whisper. "Do you think he could have faked being on that Montreal train and come back and started for—South America?"

"I think we'd better let that matter drop for a moment and see what we can do with the Bigelow issue," Tony replied.

The guard was returning.

That was Tuesday.

A whole week passed.

The days went slowly for Tony, but not so slowly as those that had preceded, because he was now constantly expectant of news from Leslie Boyd. He felt certain that somewhere Boyd was working with his brilliant energy to solve the crime.

Then Tony received a shock.

On the eleventh day of his incarceration the Commissioner himself appeared at the door of Tony's cell and was let in. He looked, Tony thought, unsure of himself and almost embarrassed. He said, "I've got news for you."

Tony waited.

"We've found Boyd."

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Tony jumped up. "And—?"

"I came down here to express the department's chagrin, personally."

Tony had been right. Good old Les!

"He killed himself yesterday."

Tony sat down again, his face blank, his feelings numb. "Killed himself?"

"A farmer found Boyd's body this morning. It was lying just outside David Cole's summer house at Elkhorn Lake in the Adirondacks."

"But—!" Tony closed his mouth.

The Commissioner's eyes showed amusement. "You were going to tell me that Les Boyd was all packed to go South, weren't you? That was a mighty clever piece of work you did with Miss Jones, or Temple, or whatever her name is. We wouldn't have known about it if we hadn't kept good track of the girl. We heard her talking to her reporter friend and checked up on Boyd's clothes ourselves—"

Tony shrugged. "All right," he said quietly. "I'm a bum detective. Suppose you tell me just exactly what happened."

"Boyd blew a hole through himself with a shotgun some time last night. A big hole. He fell in the snow, and his body was frozen when the farmer found it. The farmer decided to look around the Cole place when he saw a light burning in the basement. Boyd had been hiding up there for several days, evidently. They found lots of empty cans and a bed and blankets where he had slept, as well as one other thing that I'll tell you about later."

Tony shook his head. "You can't tell me that Les Boyd killed Dave Cole and then went up to Cole's place in the Adirondacks and committed suicide. It doesn't make sense. He wasn't that kind of guy."

The Commissioner's face expressed a combination of pity and disdain for so credulous a person as Tony. "If you'd had as much to do with murder as I have, you'd know that a man can look like one thing all his life and be another. Besides, Boyd was plainly a pretty dizzy figure. A rich bachelor—love affairs—that collection of emeralds—an early life of busting around the world in all kinds of adventures and scrapes.

"No, Andrews. It doesn't do any good to deny facts. Boyd decided to kill Cole. He got hold of your knife so that you'd be implicated and clear his trail. He went over to Cole's house and did the job. Then he called you up and locked you in. Being locked in that apartment with a dead body was supposed to get your wind up, throw you into a panic, make you leave fingerprints, or yell for help. Before help came he removed the chairs so that nobody would believe you had been locked in."

The Commissioner cleared his throat. "After Boyd called you, and just before you arrived at the apartment—maybe when you were being

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announced by ringing that bell—Boyd called *us*, so that there would be policemen on the scene to catch you. Then he went out—maybe down the fire escape from the window in the top-floor hall—and ordered his bags sent down to the station. It was a dandy trap for you!

"Now, look at his getaway. He has his bags put on a Montreal train. But his bags are full of summer clothes. That's where he was too slick. He figured that we would find out he was packed for the South, and therefore that we would look for him in the South. It just happens that we weren't bright enough to do that. He actually goes North, but he messes up that trail, too. Do you get it now?"

Tony nodded slowly, the completeness of the Commissioner's diagnosis overcoming his feelings. "Sure, I get it. He actually went up to the Adirondack camp but he left what looked like a slip—to lead the trail South."

The Commissioner shook his head. "He did better than that. He didn't dare stay on that train. He might be nailed by a fluke if anybody saw him. But nobody did—really. His berth was made and his bags were in it. He handed out the ticket through the curtains when the train started. He wanted to disappear, and that was easy, because he had never appeared, really. If he had, we would have found his bags. But he could have opened his window and tossed them into the Harlem River. He could have hopped off the train without them anywhere above 125th Street—by opening the doors, letting himself out, and slamming them after him.

"There was a blizzard that night, remember, and the train was going along by fits and starts. He could have come back into the New York station by subway and taken another train going north, or he could have picked up an automobile and driven. What he did is not important. The fact is that he left the train to break the trail. We were supposed to think he was going north on that train. Then we were supposed to find out about his bags being packed with summer clothes and start looking for him in the South.

"Just how and when he actually went to Cole's summer place doesn't matter. That's the dope. But he lost his nerve, and after he had done what he intended to do, he blew a big hole through his backbone with a load of buckshot."

Tony swallowed. "Just what did he intend to do? Why did he go to the house on Elkhorn Lake? Why did he kill Dave?"

"We won't ever know all of that," the Commissioner answered. "Boyd went up to Elkhorn Lake to destroy the evidence of his motive for the murder. He used the fireplace to burn a sheaf of papers. We found what was left unburned because it

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was held together by one of those heavy metal clips. Thirty-seven pages written in pen and ink on the stationery of the Oregon Central Lumber & Douglas Fir Corporation.

"The rest of it was ashes. And those ashes are the secret of why Boyd killed David Cole. Cole had something on him—a signed confession maybe, something that Boyd had written out and Cole kept. So Boyd killed Cole and went up to the house in the Adirondacks where the document was kept, and found it and destroyed it. Then he lost his nerve and shot himself."

The Police Commissioner stood up. "I guess that's about all, Andrews. I certainly apologize for the days you've spent here. You can hardly blame us for arresting you after what Doyle and McCluskey saw. I suppose you could bring a suit for false arrest. But I wish you wouldn't do it. In the first place, you might not win the suit. In the second place, you're in a spot now where if you ever need a favor from the police department you will only have to take up your telephone."

"I wasn't thinking of suing," Tony answered absent-mindedly.

The Commissioner sagged for an instant with relief and then clasped Tony's hand. "Fine! Fine! Splendid! Any time we can be of service to you—"

He walked toward the door of the cell and out. The door was not closed behind him. Tony looked at it without seeing it and then heard the Commissioner's booming voice: "Come on, old man! You've done your time! Don't tell me you're stir-daffy."

Tony grinned and walked out of his cell. He wasn't stir-daffy. He was thinking—thinking furiously and purposefully. The newspapers would print the story and the public would accept it. Leslie Boyd had murdered David Cole and implicated Tony Andrews, and made a getaway and finally killed himself, after destroying some sort of confession which David Cole had in his possession. It was about that "confession" that Tony was thinking.

More than a year ago Tony, himself, had gone out to Oregon to look over a property. A lumber property. Sitting in an office in Portland, Oregon, Tony had written by hand a report of that property to David Cole. He had written it on the stationery of the Oregon Central Lumber & Douglas Fir Corporation. He had fastened the report together with a heavy metal paper clip. He had sent the report to Cole by air mail. He had numbered the pages in the report, and there had been exactly thirty-seven.

Thus the document burned beyond reclaim, the document that was supposed to contain the motive for the murder of Cole by Les Boyd, was not a confession at all! It was no more than a business report. Les Boyd would not have taken the trouble to burn it for any sensible

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reason whatever. It had probably been carried to Cole's summer place in a brief case by Cole himself and filed away, to be forgotten.

Tony went outdoors. The midday sun was shining and its light was unbearably blinding. He hailed a cab and gave the address of his apartment. All the way uptown he was thinking hard. Why did Boyd burn that report?

He had not used the paper to start a log fire, for then even the portion of it held by the clip would have been consumed. There wasn't anything in that report which concerned Les in any way.

Pedro heard Tony's key in the door and opened it and smiled.

"I want a tub full of hot water," Tony said, as he took off his coat. "And hot coffee and toast that doesn't bend when you pick it up by one corner. Call up my secretary and tell her to come here with the mail and anything else that's important. I won't go down to the office until tomorrow."

Tony reached the stage where soap and water have done their appointed tasks and a man merely takes his ease beneath the restful patter of a warm spray. He gave sudden voice while in this position: "Holy mackerel!"

A simple and rather obvious explanation of the burned papers had just occurred to him.

Its implications were appalling. Suppose somebody else had burned that report to make it *look* as if Les Boyd's motive for killing Cole was to be forever unknown.

Tony had imagined that Les was on the trail of Cole's murderer. But suppose it was the other way around: suppose the murderer had trailed Les! Killed Les—put the shotgun in Les's hands, and burned the papers in a conspicuous place so that Les's suicide would seem motivated!

Suppose Les had been murdered *to cover up the murder of Cole*—to accomplish just what it had accomplished in the mind of the police.

Such a set of circumstances would have closed the case—had, in fact, closed it.

Tony was sure that he was right. Les Boyd had been murdered by the same man who had murdered Cole.

Tony gasped under a sudden deluge of cold water, toweled himself furiously, and went into his bedroom. As he began to put on his clothes, Pedro knocked on his door. "Miss Jones is outside."

He finished his dressing quickly. The girl was sitting on a sofa by the fireplace, and when he came out she stood up. "I'm terribly glad—"

Tony grinned. "Me, too. Are you all ready to do some work?"

She opened her brief case. "You bet I am! And I hope you are. Smithson is wild to see you. Williams is down in the office talking to Mr. Fletcher right now—"

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She stopped because Tony was paying no attention to her. He had picked up a newspaper that she had been carrying. On the first page were headlines:

LESLIE BOYD COMMITS SUICIDE

WAS MURDERER OF DAVID COLE

Andrews Released

Tony glanced through the story. He tossed the paper back on the sofa. "Look, Wanda. I didn't mean business. I meant work on this—" He pointed at the paper. "It wasn't a confession that Les Boyd burned, and he didn't burn it."

He told her rapidly about his deductions, finishing with the words, "Whoever was up there was also the person in Dave's apartment the night we were there. The murderer. What I want to do—"

She interrupted him excitedly. "—is to check everybody's alibi for last night and the day before! Alavo's and mine and—" She broke off. "But that wouldn't do any good, necessarily, would it?"

"I hadn't thought of it," Tony answered rapidly. "My idea was for you and me to go over everything that happened the night of Dave's murder. To see if we could remember anything that would throw some new light on this. But why not check the alibis? Why wouldn't the easiest thing be to find who was out of town yesterday, when Les was shot?"

Wanda looked frightened. "I was just thinking—"

"Thinking what?"

"Thinking that the paper said Mr. Boyd's body was frozen. And I was wondering if that didn't mean he could have been dead for days. If a person is frozen, can even a medical man be sure how long he's been dead?"

Tony stared at his secretary. "You mean Boyd might have been lying up there for days?"

"It's possible. Why don't you call up a doctor and ask him? Because if it was done a week ago, for example, it would be pretty hard to check anybody's alibi."

Tony picked up the phone and called his own doctor. He explained swiftly that his question must be regarded as an inviolable confidence. The doctor's reply confirmed Wanda's suggestion. "I presume you are talking about Boyd, Tony, but we will skip that. It crossed my mind when I read the papers this noon. How did the country doctor up in the Adirondacks know the length of time Boyd had lain there if the body was frozen? Unless he had something like a recent cover of snow to go by, he couldn't possibly know. That is the answer. In a solidly frozen human body no deterioration takes place whatever and I'd defy any medical man to say whether a given individual had been in that condition for hours or for weeks."

Tony said, "Thanks," and hung up. He turned to Wanda. "You were right."

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"We'd better tell the police."

He shook his head. "Not yet. Look here, Wanda. You and I know more about this than anybody else alive. I've got a terrific feeling that—"

Her blonde head nodded. "I know! You feel that you can almost see who did it!"

"—and I want to think a little more about it—about the night Dave was killed. Just what happened. When did it happen? Whose story fails to check with what we know? Wanda!" His voice raised. "We ought to go back to Dave's apartment. We ought to go over the whole evening. Have Dave's things been moved?"

She shook her head. "The police sealed up the apartment as it was."

Tony again picked up the telephone and called the Police Commissioner. "About that favor you promised me," he said.

The Commissioner's voice was hearty. "Anything from a low license number to getting your nephew out of jail."

"I want to go into Cole's apartment with my secretary, and I don't want Doyle and McCluskey peering in the window."

There was a pause. "If you've got something on this, Andrews, maybe you better tell me."

"If I get something, I will tell you."

By the time a man from headquarters arrived at Tony's apartment with the keys, the afternoon was nearly worn away. The two men and the girl drove down to West Ninth Street. The policeman opened the front door of the house, and they filed upstairs.

On the door of the apartment itself there was a sign and a padlock. Again keys turned, and the door swung open. The policeman said, "Anything else?"

Tony thanked him. The policeman went down the stairs.

They stood together in Dave's living room and Wanda said, "Don't you think we had better turn on the lights first?"

He nodded. "All the ones that were on that night."

When floor and table lamps drove back the dusk, they could see the stain on the sofa and on the floor, dark brown now, and the ashes of the fire that had been burning in Cole's grate. In the bedroom the same suit with the same note pinned on it was still hanging on the bureau drawer. When they were satisfied that they had switched on the proper lights, they returned to the living room.

"Now," Tony said, "you watch me. I've knocked on the door." He walked toward it. "And now I come in." He halted. He said parenthetically. "It must have been about nine o'clock. The door wasn't answered. I unlocked it and walked in. Dave was lying there."

Tony acted out what he was saying. "Lying there just as if he

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had been doing one of his suspension presses—with a knife in his back . . . Let me see. I called Les." He called—once. "Les!"

He shrugged. "All right. No answer. I walked to the guest room." Wanda followed him as he went down the dark hall and switched on the guest room lights. "I took a squint into the closets here and moved on to Dave's room. I read the note to Mrs. Bunnell about the cleaners and I counted the dough on the bureau. Five or six hundred dollars. Next I looked into the bathroom." He did so. "There were a couple of sloppy towels on the floor and a lot of water. Dave always bathed like a sea lion.

"Then the kitchen. There wasn't anything out of order in it." He turned on the kitchen light and they gazed at that room. "So far so good. Let me think. I walked back into the living room to call the police."

He stepped aside and Wanda went ahead. His voice trailed her. "Now. I picked up the telephone. The wire's cut—see? I decided to go out and find the police. Wait a minute. I hadn't taken off my gloves. One of the first thoughts that crossed my mind was not to leave any fingerprints while I was investigating. When I went to the door it wouldn't open. So! Let's see if those chairs will jam the door."

They went into the hall and Tony put one of the Spanish chairs face down on the hall carpet. It fitted tightly between the door and the newel post of the stairs that led to the roof. "Now you do it and I'll go inside and try to push."

They made the experiment and Tony was unable to open the door. Wanda picked up the chair and put it back in its place. Tony came out.

"That's what did it, all right," he said. He glanced around the hall—at the ship wallpaper, the crimson carpet, the table, and the sizzling radiator. He smiled a little at Wanda. "Kind of scary, isn't it?"

Her eyes met his brightly. "It's the weirdest thing I ever did in my life. The feeling that you almost know exactly what happened is terribly intense, though."

He did not reply to that. "When I found I couldn't get out this door I tried the kitchen door. Come on." They went through the house. "It was double-locked. Then back into the living room. I was absolutely positive that Dave's murderer was still in the building—on account of the barricaded door, of course. When I came back from trying the kitchen door—right now, that is—I saw Dave's .45 on the table—here—loaded but not used.

"I stuck it in my pocket because I thought I might need it any minute. Then I saw that the *Register* was opened. to a story about me, and I knew it had been left there by Les. At least, it had his name and apartment number on it. The next thing I noticed was

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Señora Alavo's perfume, and I sniffed along this sofa."

He repeated his actions of that night. "I knew the perfume was familiar but I couldn't remember whose it was. I sat down and tried to think."

Wanda was standing opposite the sofa where Tony sat, her face earnest with concentration.

Tony went on: "It was while I was sitting here that it occurred to me that Dave looked as if he had been doing that suspension press. I smoked a cigarette and chucked my ashes in the grate so nobody would look for my brand of cigarettes. I saw Loretta's handkerchief in the other sofa, and I burned it.

"Then I realized the knife in Dave's back was just like my own. I felt compelled to look at this one. So I did. It was just about this time that McCluskey and Doyle reached the balcony by the front window and began to watch."

He got down on one knee over the spot where Dave had been lying. "It was my knife, but discovering that wasn't any comfort. If I hadn't thought I was still locked in, I might have walked out with it—perhaps. But while I knelt here I felt cold air on my back—"

"—and I came in," Wanda said.

Tony stood up. "You will never know how relieved I was to see you. When I felt that cold air I thought my last day had arrived."

For a moment they looked at each other, smiling. And then suddenly Tony started. "Cold air! Was it cold in the hall? Do you remember?"

She frowned, and finally nodded. "It was quite cold. The bottom hall was warm but it got colder as I went up the stairs. That fits with what the police said. The murderer got away by opening the hall window and going down the fire escape."

Tony was shaking his head. "Even on a night like that, opening and shutting a window wouldn't let in enough cold air to chill a couple of halls. It was hotter than Tophet"—he stalked across the room and opened the front door of the apartment—"hotter than blazes out here when I came up. The radiator was steaming away just as it is now. Look!"

He rushed down the hall to a window. Outside was the iron fire escape. He opened the window, ducked his head, climbed out on the fire escape, and came back into the hall, shutting the window behind him. A little eddy of cold air had blown through the window, but when they walked back to Dave's door it was still warm in the hall.

Wanda looked back toward the fire escape. "But if the cold air didn't come from that window—"

Suddenly and in horror she drew her breath. She had noticed the direction of Tony's eyes. He was looking up the staircase to the roof.

"I don't think the papers ever made any report of an investigation of that roof."

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He started slowly up the stairs. When his head and shoulders came in contact with the trap door to the roof he unhooked it and pushed hard. It lifted. He climbed up the rest of the stairs and held down his hand for Wanda.

The pink glow of the streets was reflected dimly on the winter-swept roof. Iron benches, chairs, tables, flower urns, and flower boxes were barely visible. Snow was heaped over shapeless lumps.

Tony stood there for a moment, and then walked over to the wall around the edge of the roof and looked down.

"It would be a cinch to drop from here to the fire escape," he said slowly.

Tony's gaze rested on the formless lumps of snow which marked the positions of summer furniture.

"Are you thinking the same thing I am?" he asked.

Her voice was choked. "I'm thinking that Leslie Boyd could have been murdered that night and carried up here—"

Tony took her hand. "Carried up here." he repeated rapidly. "The snow would have covered him in a few minutes! His body would have looked like another one of these flower boxes. And he'd have frozen, Wanda! It was bitter-cold!"

"Then what?" she whispered.

"The murderer," Tony replied, "has had eleven nights to come back here and get that frozen body and drive it up to David Cole's house in the Adirondacks! Listen, Wanda! It could have stayed here frozen till now, even, as far as that goes. It's been cold right along.

"If Les came into Dave's apartment and found him dead, and the murderer was hiding there and killed Les, too, he could easily have brought him up here. Brought him here and then taken him miles away—" His voice sank. "Thawed out the body and used the shotgun —to erase a stab wound just like the one in Dave's back! Then he could have left the body to freeze again."

"But why didn't the police look up here?" Wanda asked.

"They probably did come up and take a look around. Late that night, or the morning after the murder. If we're right, Les's body was here then. But whoever brought it here could have covered it, and his own tracks, and the gale that night would have blown all the surfaces smooth in ten minutes.

"The cops came up here and saw nothing, which is understandable. Besides, they were sure they had their man. They'd seen me with that knife in my hand—through the front window. They weren't looking for anything else. If they'd been a little more thorough"—he glanced around the roof—"they might have found—"

"Let's go down," she whispered.

Tony murmured, "It would have been as simple as that!"

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He helped her down the staircase and closed the trapdoor. Once more they were standing in front of Cole's apartment.

"The hall's cold now, isn't it?" she said.

She shuddered from head to foot.

He nodded and opened the door to Dave's apartment again. "I'm sure of it now, Wanda. Les Boyd wouldn't have burned that report of mine for any reason in the world. So somebody else did. Les wouldn't have killed himself. Somebody did that to transfer guilt for the murder of Cole—which that person had already committed."

"Les wasn't out hunting for the murderer for the past eleven days. He was lying dead, and his body was kept just as it was for all that time because it was frozen. He was lying up here on the roof for a while and then in the Adirondacks. It would have been a cinch to get Les's body down that fire escape from the roof and into an automobile. Anybody who saw the thing would have thought Les was a drunk."

Wanda said uncomfortably, "I guess you've got something to tell the Commissioner now."

Tony's head moved negatively. "An idea, but nothing to back it up. If my idea is right, and two murders were done in this room that night, there should have been signs of two murders. Up there on the roof I assumed that Les was stabbed, but he might have been struck over the head, for example."

Tony's eyes moved toward the sofa. "If the murderer had heard Les coming up the stairs and jumped behind that seat—if Les had come in and telephoned me and the police, and sat down opposite Dave to wait for me—"

Thoughtfully he walked to the spot where he had found David Cole lying face down with outstretched arms. He looked at that spot. He gazed from there along the stained carpet to the larger stain on the back of the sofa.

"I don't suppose it ever occurred to the police to do blood tests," he said slowly.

Half understanding him, she murmured, "What do you mean?"

"Suppose the blood here on the sofa was *Les's* blood?"

"But—?"

In a low tone, acting as he talked, Tony explained. "Let's assume that I am the murderer. I kid Dave into showing me he can still do a suspension press. I stab him. That's easy. While I am still kneeling I hear somebody come up the stairs, or perhaps ring the bell. I have just used the knife, so I snatch it and jump behind the sofa. Les comes in, sees Dave, walks over to the phone, and calls. Then he seats himself on the sofa to wait."

"But," interrupted Wanda, "how did Mr. Boyd get into the apartment? The murderer wouldn't have opened the door for him."

"Les kept a set of keys to Dave's place. Dave gave me a set, too. He

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wanted us to feel we could drop in and use his place any time. Les must have rung the bell and got no answer, and decided to come in and wait till Dave came home."

"Yes, I see."

Tony crouched behind the sofa. He pointed at the stain on its back. "Les has made his phone calls and is sitting right here and I am directly behind him with the knife in my hand. I know that a third person as well as the police will be on the scene in a few minutes. I've got to get away before they come, but if Les sees me, it is all over for me. I realize that he is going to sit there and wait. All I have to do is reach over the top of this thing to kill him.

"You can't hang any harder for two murders than for one, but as I crouch here it dawns on me that if I can make it look as if one man had killed the other and then committed suicide, I can forever divert suspicion from myself. And now look, Wanda. I stab Les."

Tony made a gesture so realistically that the girl winced. "That makes the stain. I move Les over to where Dave is lying. It's simple, isn't it? Everyone will assume that Dave was stabbed in the sofa and fell forward on the floor, leaving a trail of blood. It'll look like one murder only. I have already decided how and where I can hide Les's body for a long time. On the roof in the snow. I put the knife back in Dave's body and I pick up Boyd —and the rest we know."

Wanda frowned. "There's one thing, though. Why did the murderer barricade you in with those chairs? We've thought all along it was to pin the crime on you. But if he had already set the scene to make Mr. Boyd look like the murderer, why did he want to incriminate you, too?"

Tony considered. "Oh, gosh! I suppose we'll never know the truth of all this." He leaned against a chair despondently.

"Maybe it was this way," Wanda said slowly. "You arrived long before the police. Suppose the murderer was just carrying Mr. Boyd up the stairs to the roof when he heard you coming. He wouldn't have time to get out through the trap door—it's heavy and awkward and he was—he was carrying something." She stopped short, looking very white.

"Of course," Tony carried on her suggestion, exactly. "So he hid on the stairs to the roof until I had gone into Dave's apartment and then barred the door with the chairs to keep me from coming out and catching him before he had finished. After he had Les's body on the roof and covered with snow, he came back and took the chairs away."

Wanda asked for a cigarette. Her hand trembled. "And how about the other phone call—to the hotel?"

Tony glanced at her quickly. "Other phone call? That's right! Les called his hotel and ordered his bags sent to that Montreal train!

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That doesn't make very good sense —unless—unless—it was the murderer who called the hotel. We can ask the hotel clerk if he definitely recognized the voice. And that's important! Because if it was the murderer who called, *then the murderer knew that Les had packed his bags!*"

Their eyes met. "That's right," she answered slowly. "If the murderer telephoned the hotel, he probably got on the train himself for a little while, and handed out the tickets and disposed of the bags, and got off the train as soon as possible."

Tony said, "Let's go up and talk to the hotel clerk."

"At least," she said, "what the Commissioner believes—it simply couldn't have happened—on account of that burned report. And what we are imagining certainly *could* have happened—if the man who killed Dave was very clever."

They began to turn out the lights in the apartment. Tony called sharply. "Why a 'man'?"

There was blankness in her voice. "A woman—?"

"If we are right—why not? Cole was killed while he was lying face down on the floor. A woman could have done it. Les was stabbed in the back when he didn't realize there was another person in the apartment. A woman could have done that. And as for carrying Les Boyd's body up the stairs to the roof—Les didn't even weigh a hundred pounds. You could have done it. And you have a husky voice. You might have been able to make the hotel clerk think you were a man!"

The clerk at the Brail Hotel who had taken the order that sent Les Boyd's two suitcases to the railroad station gave them grounds for a reasonable doubt.

"I don't remember the voice much. It's noisy in the lobby. It was just a voice—but I'll tell you. Mr. Boyd always used to say, 'This is Boyd—14-B.' Now, some people say, 'This is Mr. Norman K. Jones,' or others say, 'This is Mrs. Wilson of Apartment So-and-so.' Whoever spoke that night said, 'This is Boyd—14-B,' so I naturally assumed it was Boyd."

Tony and Wanda went out into the street. "It's half-past seven," he said. "Will you have supper?"

"Yes."

There was a long silence between them as they rode in a taxicab, a silence that was broken finally when he murmured, "A man or a woman—somebody who was well enough acquainted with Dave to know he could be kidded into doing that suspension press. Somebody who knew Les so well that he or she could telephone exactly the way Les did. Someone who knew about Dave's summer place."

He chuckled mirthlessly. "That means you—"

"I didn't get on the train, and you know it. I was with you."

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He chuckled mirthlessly again.

"You made two telephone calls that night, though. Before and after the few minutes we spent at the movies. One could have been to get Les's bags sent to the train and the other could have been to have somebody take care of the train ride itself. You could have done it if you had had an accomplice. For that matter, so could I if I had had somebody to take care of that train ride. But, for that matter—"

He hesitated a moment and went on: "—so could Pedro. He had some kind of grudge against Cole. He could have left the house that evening when Les came in to talk to me, because I didn't see him again until morning, and in the eleven days I was in jail he could easily have transported the body to the Adirondacks."

"I don't think Pedro would have done such a—"

"Neither do I," Tony replied. The cab stopped in front of a restaurant. "But I'm just trying to show you that, if we are right about what happened, it still could have conceivably been done by not only you or me or Pedro, but by Loretta, or Jack—he was home alone that night, and she said she was at the theater—or by either one of the Alavos—or by any one of an unknown number of absolute strangers."

The doorman pushed open the restaurant door. "Even if we do know *how*, we still don't know *who*." She stood beside him as he checked his coat and a headwaiter walked smilingly toward them. "So I haven't got anything at all to tell the Commissioner yet, and I don't think we will ever find out exactly which person knew that Boyd was going South and could use that knowledge about the luggage, because obviously disclosing that would give away the person who did know it."

Tony was following her among upturned faces, talking to Wanda's back. "In consequence of which dilemma I think I'll try a little notion on *all* the possible suspects. It is a good notion but I'll probably find myself back in the Tombs for slander or whatever it is."

"What's your idea?" she asked as they sat down.

He shook his head. "I won't tell you unless it works. Now, let's forget all about it. Let's have the best dinner obtainable, and afterward I'm going to send you home." He looked at the menu.

She wanted to ask questions, but she saw that he was determined not to talk any more about the deaths of his partners. She was glad, in a way. She hoped that he would talk to her about himself and herself. He did . . .

Wanda was waiting in his office at 9:30 when he appeared. He was excited. He clapped his hands together when he came through the door.

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He had a black eye. Wanda stared at the black eye.

"Part of my idea," he said in reply to her unasked question. "We can cross Señor Alavo off our list, Wanda. Furthermore, he evened up things for that sock in the jaw I gave him."

She waited for him to say more but he did not, so she handed him the mail. He glanced through it quickly. "I want to talk this over with Jack Raymond. Tell him to come in. I persuaded Jack to take a Turkish bath with me last night, by the way."

Her eyes were suddenly alarmed but he shook his head. "We only talked about business. However, I'm going to leave the intercom open and I want you to listen at the other end." Her face was white and questioning. He shrugged. "Maybe I am just going to get another black eye."

She went out.

Jack entered, sat down, and smiled.

Tony got out of his chair and half sat on his desk. "You killed Davé with my knife, Jack," he said crisply. "Then you killed Les. You carried him up that dark stairway and hid with him while I came up. You blocked the door with a chair while you got him out on the roof. Then you went home. You didn't have time to take the short ride on the Montreal train, so you persuaded somebody else to do it. Loretta? It doesn't matter. In one of the last eleven nights you took a trip with the body up to the Adirondacks and you made a murder look like a suicide by burning a sheaf of papers and using a shotgun to destroy a stab wound."

Jack sat still. Tony's first words had erased his smile, but now it was on his face again, changed somewhat. "Just why did I do all these things, Tony?"

Tony hunched himself up on his desk. "Loretta said that you were broke. That you gambled. She said that she was trying to marry Dave, or me, to save the family from ruin. I thought she was kidding. She wasn't. You handle enough of this firm's properties to embezzle a good deal of money—a good deal without being caught; but if you've taken any, maybe you've put it back now. I haven't looked into the records. Dave probably had. You killed him to keep him from telling us."

Jack's smile was still unabashed. "You've thought up a very fancy nightmare, Tony. You certainly don't intend to make such a charge seriously?"

"I intend to."

Then Jack stopped smiling. "I suppose you can prove it?"

Tony reached in his pocket. Jack's hand slid quickly toward his own pocket, but Tony produced no weapon. He dropped two small objects on his desk.

"Here's a button from the suit you were wearing that night and a little black notebook from your

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vest pocket. I haven't had time to dry the notebook out, you may notice. It fell into the snow on the roof of Dave Cole's house. The button was on the staircase to the roof. Funny you haven't missed the notebook."

For an instant Jack's eyes stared. "I could have sworn I had it yesterday—" He reached into his hip pocket then and pulled out a revolver. His voice was low in its intensity. "Hand over the button and the notebook. Then come along with me."

"Where?"

"While Loretta and I pack." He pointed the gun steadily. "We'll tie you up and put you in a closet, where they'll find you in a day or so."

Jack was smiling once again, and his third smile was an expression Tony had never seen—a deadly expression.

Jack said quietly, "I don't need to tell you that I'll use this if I have to—do I?" He put the gun in his pocket, still keeping it pointed at Tony. "It was clever work to figure all that out, Tony. Yes, I did it. And I helped myself to the firm's funds. Dave only found out through a fluke."

"Tell me one thing," said Tony. "Where was Les going that night? Why were his bags packed for a Southern trip? And how did you know they were packed?"

"He told me. He was determined to stop this quarrel between you and Dave at any cost—even the cost of a trip to South America to check on your findings about the bond issue. He didn't tell you or Dave because he was afraid you'd try to stop him. But he had his bags packed, ready to leave that night, if you two couldn't patch things up . . . That was one thing you couldn't find out, for all your detective work. And you've made one mistake. You should have had some witnesses to this little scene."

Very delicately Tony tapped the top of his intercom. "I have." He leaned down a little. "Wanda! Bring everybody in here."

For a second Jack was silent and motionless. Then he said, "I wish you'd do everything you can for Loretta. Keep her out of it. She didn't know why she carried out my orders for her about the Montreal train until the next day."

Tony said, "All right, Jack."

Then the door opened. Wanda was there, with others behind her. . . . The shot made surprisingly little noise, because Jack had pressed the muzzle of his gun close to his body . . .

Tony and Wanda sat in another taxicab riding toward the Police Commissioner's office.

"He'll be furious." She referred to the Commissioner. "Why didn't you tell him that you had found the button and the notebook?"

He turned toward her. "Because I hadn't. The button was from one

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of my own suits. It was just an ordinary black one—and I stole the notebook out of his vest last night at the Turkish bath."

They rode a little longer. There was relief on their faces. Presently she looked up at him with a shadowy smile. "You're terribly clever, aren't you? I guess the best brains do go into business. The first time you dictated that speech I thought it was kind of funny, but now—"

Tony shook his head, and his grin appeared. "If I had brains I would have had the firm's books secretly audited ten days ago." He took her hand and patted it. "If I had brains I would have figured Loretta out sooner for what she is. If I had any brains whatever I would have paid more attention to a gray-eyed, silver-blonde girl about twenty-five years old named Miss Jones. I mean—Miss Temple."

"You've been calling her Wanda for the last day."

"Have I? Good for me! Maybe I have some sense, after all!"

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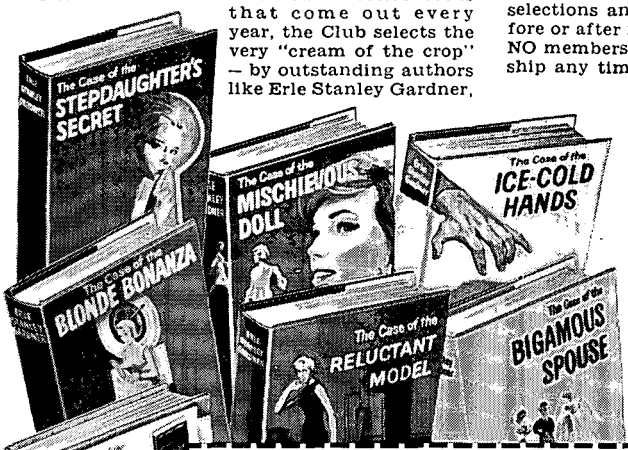
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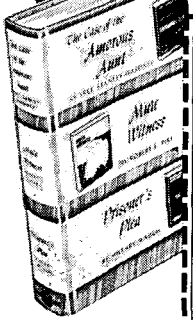

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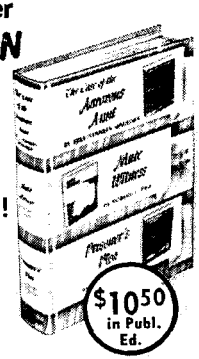

6 PERRY MASON Bafflers
IN THESE FULL-SIZE FULL-LENGTH HARD-COVER BOOKS

The Case of the STEPDAUGHTER'S SECRET
— tells his client way to deal with a blackmailer — "YOU KILL HIM!"

2 The Case of the MISCHIEVOUS DOLL
When the judge asks Perry why he *switched fingerprints* to deceive a jury, Perry says "NO EXPLANATION"!

3 The Case of the ICE-COLD HANDS
Perry finds Marvin Fremont *slumped* in the shower stall — bullet hole in his shirt — *DEAD!*

4 The Case of the BLONDE BONANZA
Perry's in hot water! The testimony to convict his client of MURDER comes from his OWN investigator!

5 The Case of the RELUCTANT MODEL
Is the masterpiece a fraud? The ONE person who *knows* gets shot — and Perry ends up in *real trouble!*

6 The Case of the BIGAMOUS SPOUSE
Stunning Gwynn Elston begs Perry to protect her . . . then SHE's nabbed for *First Degree* MURDER!

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Erle Stanley Gardner
A man is drugged, stabbed, *killed*. Both drugs and weapon are Perry's client's!

8 MUTE WITNESS
Robert L. Pike
When a Mafia man squeals, who gets him first? The cops? *Or the dreaded "Black Hand ?*

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Hillary Waugh
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